

**Ethical Rhetorical Practice: Theorizing Lévinasian Ethics
in “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”**

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THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

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This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Courtney, for her love; my son, Liam, for his bravery; my daughter, Molly, for her joy; and mum and dad for their support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go first to the members of my thesis committee – Ralph Cintron, Janet Giltrow, Todd DeStigter, Robin Reames, Michael Bernard-Donals, and Drew Dalton – for their mentorship and assistance in developing this project.

I would also like to thank the following individuals for their ongoing support and friendship: my colleagues at Rock Valley College, Rob Mawyer, Frank Farmer of the University of Kansas, and John Duffy of the University of Notre Dame. My thanks also goes to the staff at the Crawford Library at UIC Rockford for their ongoing assistance.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Rhetoric Society of America, particularly the biennial Summer Institutes in Boulder, Lawrence, and Madison, for opportunities to develop and discuss my project as it has developed throughout the years.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AT	<i>Alterity and Transcendence</i>
BPW	<i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i>
CCC	<i>College Composition and Communication</i>
CCCC	Conference on College Composition and Communication
CPP	<i>Collected Philosophical Papers</i>
EAE	Edited American English
EE	<i>Existence and Existants</i>
OB	<i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i>
SAE	Standard American English
SRTOL	Students' Right to Their Own Language
TI	<i>Totality and Infinity</i>

SUMMARY

By calling Emmanuel Lévinas to the scene, this project troubles the inter-animation of the *polis* and the teaching of writing. Lévinas offers to writing studies a rendering of ethicality as a rhetorical condition which begins and ends in obligation to the face of an Other. Chapter One introduces and establishes the grounds for my inquiry, beginning with writing studies' interest the *polis*, the limitations of that interest, and how the Students' Right to Their Own Language movement is an appropriate case study for re-examining the ethicality of writing studies. Chapter Two begins by establishing the justifying role the *polis* plays in all sides of the Students' Right to Their Own Language debate, and then problematizes the *polis* as an ethical warrant for rhetoric and composition. In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to Lévinas's phenomenology and explore the ethical rhetorical as an ethical paradigm for rhetoric's engagement with others. Chapter Four takes up the problem of violence, a problem none of the five *topoi* of Chapter Three adequately address. Chapter Five returns to SRTOL and considers how teachers of writing might position vulnerability as the primary condition for writers.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is present in [Lévinas'] work an exigency to attend to suffering, injustice, and violence, and his account of the ethical becomes a labour born not only of philosophical interest, but human necessity. (Todd 2)

A. Who Cares What Stanley Fish Thinks?

In the final 2012 issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Robert Danisch's title declares, "Stanley Fish is Not a Sophist." Danisch goes on to critique the prevailing notion that Stanley Fish's pragmatism and his commitment to rhetoric make him a neo-sophist *par excellence*. Whether Fish is or isn't a sophist is an interesting question, but more compelling is what Danisch believes is at stake if he is. What threat does Fish pose to neo-sophism?

Danisch argues that Fish's account of rhetoric "conflates and confuses" rhetoric's three-part work as a hermeneutic, a mode of justification, and an art of civic deliberation, effectively over-emphasizing the first two and obfuscating the sophists' commitment to the third (419–20). Danisch's complaint is that Fish's exuberant anti-foundationalism leads him to argue that rhetoric's only function is to, and here he quotes Fish, "establish what, in a particular time and at a particular place is true" (qtd. in Danisch 406); that is, in an anti-foundational world where all claims of truth (or fact) are provisional, the art of justification becomes the only buttress against bad ideas. This understanding of rhetoric leads Fish to advocate for the production of disciplinary knowledge to the exclusion of all other of higher education's civic-minded goals

because, in Fish's view, disciplinary knowledge is the only truth academia can create without appealing to foundational grounds; in so doing, Danisch contends that Fish misunderstands the sophists' imperative to teach rhetoric "as the principle task of education *because* of the importance of those skills for democratic citizenship" (408 emphasis in original), and therefore supplants the sophist's "prudential pragmatism" with Fish's own brand of "skeptical pragmatism" (419-22). Ultimately, Danisch's contention with Fish's brand of rhetoric centers on his non-ethical commitment to knowledge--there are truth-claims (i.e. claims of true facts) that can be argued convincingly, there are those that cannot, and there is nothing more--and Fish's rejection of rhetorical instruction as a means to cultivate civic virtue. Of course, Fish's argument has its own ethic baked-in to its commitment to disciplinary knowledge, but here Danisch is looking for a more public value for sophistic rhetoric. If Stanley Fish is a sophist, then at best sophism is a non-ethical practice; for Danisch, this won't do.

Danisch's contention with Fish demonstrates a prevailing notion within rhetorical studies that the ethical truck of our disciplinary practices is tied up with the *polis* and the good offered to it by studying and teaching rhetoric. This conviction, I argue, prevails across the rhetorical fields of communication (from which Danisch hails) and composition studies (and I will draw from across them both), and this project aims to prod the inter-animation of the *polis* and specifically writing studies. My goal is to question this arrangement whereby the civic offers to writing studies its ethical truck in exchange for well-trained rhetors for the public sphere. My work queries the contemporary origins of this arrangements, its implications, limitations, and alternatives.

My dissertation is a work of rhetorical theory and analysis that contributes to the discussion of rhetoric and ethics and moves writing studies beyond its commitment to the *polis*; at the same time, it is an attempt to continue the conversation about what Emmanuel Lévinas's ethics mean for rhetoric and ethics, a conversation just beginning to flourish in writing studies. In my view, the field accepts with little consideration the paradigm which imagines rhetoric's ethics as grounded in the democratic and deliberative *polis*, executed in composition studies as a commitment to civic duty and considered in rhetorical theory in recovering sophistic rhetoric. The *polis*, I will argue, operates as the fields' god term, justifying and granting ethical weight to the disciplines' work. This arrangement, however, makes for a potentially troublesome ethics: the democratization of the rhetorical skills necessary to participate in the *polis* does nothing to mitigate the fact that deliberation is a proxy for violent competition which polices persons by enforcing who is in (the same, the citizen) and who is out (the other, the alien, the slave) of the democratic body. My task will be to demonstrate the rhetorical and ethical limits implicit in justifying rhetoric's ethicality in the *polis* where deliberation and collaboration, in and of themselves, render ethical the communal work of the *polis*.

At the same time, the field's activation of the *polis* is a custom-made response for politicians, taxpayers, and administrators who ask of higher education, What good are the humanities? What do they do? Writing studies, via its hold on required first-year writing courses and its alignment with sophistic principles of deliberation, is ready to access the *polis* and its alignment with democratic idealism to answer, We make citizens ready to engage thoughtfully in the public sphere. In large part, my project disturbs this alignment and queries the ease with which the field points to the *polis* for

its justification. Writing studies scholars have long resisted the notion that our bread and butter is a nothing other than a service-course for the institution and its other disciplines; my inquiry goes beyond this bone of contention and asks, What good do we do? Better yet, what is good about writing? Disciplinary frustration over the nature of our knowledge production aside, the answer again and again always seems to lead back to the *polis* and the good stronger writers can achieve there. What I'm pointing to here is the unique status of writing studies which seems unable to self-justify its disciplinary function within institutions of higher education without recourse to the *polis* and writing studies' role in crafting good citizens who can think, write, and compose arguments.

B. Other Options

Thankfully, there are other options for theorizing rhetoric's ethicality. In Diane Davis's *Inessential Solidarity* most notably, rhetorical theorists are beginning to explore the work of Emmanuel Lévinas and the implications of his other-centered phenomenology which imagines the other not as an entity to absorb, exclude, or contest, but as the Other to which I am always obligated for being at all.¹ Lévinas shifts the ethical equation from what constitutes moral behavior between myself and others to a relation where the ethical relation is the very encounter between others which announces being in the first place. Lévinas's ontological sociality imagines the confrontation between others as the only opportunity for mutual comprehension--not, however, as if we share in some

¹ The capitalization of other/Other is an important consideration. Typically, Lévinas capitalizes Other when referring to *autrui*, the embodied Other I encounter face to face. The un-capitalized other refers to *autre*, the common notion of another (or any other). As Pat Gehrke points out, "capitalization is significant" because, for Lévinas, "the Other" is not "a collective or a generalized other, but this singular an unique Other me, you as an individual, different from all other individuals, in this specific moment of appearance" (8).

repository of similarity (say, as citizens), but as always fundamentally other. It is to this otherness we speak, Lévinas writes:

We respond. . . The other (*autrui*) is not an object of comprehension first and interlocutor second. The two relations are intertwined. In other words, the comprehension of the other (*autrui*) is inseparable from his invocation.

To comprehend a person is already to speak with him. To posit the existence of the other (*autrui*) through letting be is already to have accepted this existence. ("Is Ontology Fundamental" 6)

The invocation of the other calls us both forth in mutual acknowledgement; this field of sociality is the space on which "I" become possible, an "I" always in debt to an other for myself. Lévinas's ontology opens up new possibilities for thinking of rhetoric as ethics, or what Davis calls the "ethico-rhetorical" (loc. 197). Importantly, Lévinas himself does not develop a politics out of his phenomenology; for that matter, neither does Davis when she transfers the Lévinasian ethics to theorizing rhetoric. My dissertation attempts to bridge this divide and works to imagine what a rhetorical education looks like when, in a Lévinasian ontology, making ethical rhetorical choices is beside the point. Instead, Lévinas via Davis prompts us to cultivate a sense of rhetoricity as itself establishing an always prior obligation to the other which Lévinas describes as always, endlessly "put[ting] me into question, empt[y]ing me of myself and empt[y]ing me without end, showing me ever new resources" ("Meaning and Sense" 52). Lévinas's point, however, is not that I have nothing, but that the other gives me everything; out of this abundance, I am obligated. He writes, "I did not know I was so rich, but I no longer have the right to keep anything for myself" (ibid). For Lévinas, I am not an individual in contest and

tension with other individuals working towards uneasy mutual benefit as the *polis* imagines; rather, to call myself “I” depends on my invocation of an Other, an invocation that gives me everything and obligates me entirely.

In his introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (JAC) on Lévinas and Rhetoric, guest editor Michael Bernard-Donals, identifies that Lévinas’s work and its others-centered ethicality is a particular type of weight on writing studies; it “vexes rhetoric, and with it our fields,” he writes, and “potentially forces us to rethink some of the platitudes with which we become so comfortable” (472). While Bernard-Donals doesn’t name the *polis* directly, it’s my contention that to take on a Lévinasian ethics for writing studies is to give up the long-held platitude that the most admirable work a well-trained rhetor can do is to use the rhetorical arts to the benefit of the democratic body. The question for rhetorical theory and composition studies can no longer be, How does a rhetor arrive at mutually beneficial, ethical discursive choices? Instead, the fields have to grapple with the reality that the details of discourse are not the arena in which ethical choices are made; Lévinas posits an ontology that strips us of the delusion that we have ethical choices to make in the first place. To speak, he argues, is to be bound to the other. If we leave behind the nexus of the *polis*, deliberation, and a rhetorical education, how can the fields of rhetorical theory and composition re-imagine ethicality as fundamental to rhetoric? How can the nexus of rhetoricity itself and our boundedness to the other point to new ways forward? As Bernard-Donals notes, “it’s not clear how Lévinas’s oeuvre” might “find a comfortable home among a cluster of fields that take rhetoric—with its emphasis on the establishment of consensus or understanding through a language that is held more or

less in common by members of a community—as central to their concerns” (471).

Nevertheless, I am compelled forward to take up Lévinas’s assumption that the human condition begins “vulnerable, abject, tethered to others” (Bernard-Donals 472), and question the field’s alignment with the *polis* by considering its response to a vulnerable student population: students whose home dialect is not Edited American English.

C. Students’ Right To Their Own Language

To pursue this line of rhetorical theory, I take up the practical issue of language policy in the composition classroom by examining the Students’ Right to Their Own Language movement. As a case study, SRTOL concretizes the ethical problem of rhetoric’s attachment to the *polis* and yet offers up ways of imagining a politics for a Lévinasian ethical ontology for writing studies. On display in SRTOL—a movement which emerged from the progressive education projects of the 1960s and sought to assert the right of non-standard English dialect speakers to their own language in higher education—is the *polis*’s ethical limitation. On one hand, the SRTOL debate is exclusively concerned with the other, the outsider and how the other must or must not—can or cannot—engage with the deliberative, democratic body; on the other hand, SRTOL offers up new possibilities and lends itself to my pursuit of politicizing Lévinas’s ethical ontology by serving as a field test for the ethico-rhetorical. By taking up a pragmatic concern of composition studies, one which emerged in the 1970s, faded, and is returning to consideration now, I intend to take what could be a purely theoretical concern for rhetorical studies and explore its political ends for language policy in education.

Chapter Two begins by establishing the justifying role the *polis* plays in all sides of the SRTOL debate, and then problematizes the *polis* as an ethical warrant for rhetoric and composition. To make the case for the ethical limits of the *polis*, I discuss the recovery of ancient sophistry in contemporary rhetorical theory and argue for the ever present limits of the *polis*: the maintenance of a contest between individuals where rhetoric is a proxy for violence. In Chapter Three, I turn my attention to Lévinas's phenomenology and explore the ethical rhetorical as an ethical paradigm for rhetoric's engagement with others. In this chapter, I consider the recent uptake of Lévinasian ethics in rhetorical studies and identify five *topoi* of the impossible—incommensurability, response-ability, hospitality, identity, and the alien—rhetorical scholars activate to square discussions of Lévinas's philosophy with rhetorical practice and analysis. At the same time, I read these five *topoi* back into the SRTOL case to deconstruct SRTOL's reliance on the *polis* and find other ways forward. Chapter Four takes up the problem of violence, a problem none of the five *topoi* of Chapter Three adequately address. This chapter departs from SRTOL briefly to thoroughly consider how Lévinas's philosophical treatment of the necessity of ethical violence is a means of pursuing justice and honoring our obligation to the other other (what he calls the Third). This chapter concludes by noting that language is always already both a violence and a means to pursue justice. Chapter Five returns to SRTOL and considers how teachers of writing might position vulnerability as the primary condition for writers. Vulnerability, I argue, identifies particularly pedagogical dispositions the writing teacher might uncover. These dispositions foreground what Pat Gehrke calls "pained attentiveness" (17) and then I trace out two specific dispositions—writing in the middle voice and the dispossession of

the subject—which shift attention from the speaking subject making ethical choices to writing itself as a plane of existence which pre-supposes obligation and justice. I then conclude by questioning just how far away from the *polis* Lévinas allows us to pull.

II. “STUDENTS’ RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE” AND THE INCONSISTENT ETHICS OF THE *POLIS*

“ . . . Lévinas would seem to be working against the grain of a western, rhetorical tradition whose principle aims involve the establishment of a community or *polis* . . . ”

(Bernard-Donals, “Rhetoric Vexed” 476)

A. The Argument

My goal in this chapter is to put into conversation the Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) movement within the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) of the 1970s and an articulation of the *polis* as the ground for rhetoric’s ethicality within the recent history of composition studies. The SRTOL resolution, passed in 1974, was a contentious pedagogical moment for the field that challenged the racist and classist primacy of Standard American English for the teaching of college writing in the United States as the field emerged from the social change of the 1960s. By examining the SRTOL movement, we can observe an attempt in the field of composition studies to establish an ethical model for rhetorical practice based in a commitment to the *polis*. In this case study, we hear compositionists articulate how language and language policy determine and are determined by one’s engagement in a political community; moreover, in this case we hear compositionists articulate how there are particular ways, worked out in language, one ought to conduct oneself in and on behalf of the *polis*. My point, however, is not merely to claim that composition studies stakes out an ethical rhetorical practice in the terms of the *polis*; my goal, rather, is to demonstrate the inconsistency of an ethical rhetorical practice

predicated, as the SRTOL movement is, on the *polis*. As I will show, the *polis* is uneasy ground on which to build an ethical theory of rhetoric for a number of reasons: the *polis* maintains a hierarchical system of citizenship, replete with citizens, others, and aliens; and, as an ethical field, the *polis* inadequately theorizes competition or violence as an ethical rhetorical practice. I label this management of *agôn* inconsistent because of the slipperiness between *agôn* as healthy competition in the public sphere and *agôn* as a proxy for state-sponsored ontological violence. When contrasted against Lévinasian ethics which hinges on the (rhetorical) obligation to the other, a *polis*-driven rhetorical ethics of democratized competition falls short. It is my goal to offer up new ways for the field to think rhetoric and ethics outside of the *polis*.

There are two common ways to imagine the *polis*, which are versions of one another. In *Politics*, Aristotle imagines that the *polis* is a natural community which rises out of the family through the village and into the State (Book One, Part One). Such a community, he writes, “is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think is good” (ibid). He goes on to argue that such a community, best governed by a democracy, unites “those who cannot live without each other”: male and female, ruler and subject, master and slave (ibid). In 1960, A.W.H.

Adkins proposes the cynical counter-definition of the *polis*:

The primary function of any state is to survive, and to prosper as well as it may; and in a small state such as a small Greek city-state, in competition with its neighbors for the produce of a not very wealthy land, this primary function can never be long out of mind. (197)

These definitions of the *polis* are versions of one another as Aristotle's social and material prosperity is a kinder, gentler way of naming survival in Adkins. If locating rhetoric's ethics in the *polis* is about finding a way to make ethical choices while fighting for survival and maneuvering against others to ensure prosperity in the *polis*, then, from my vantage point, the field has a lot of work to do. After considering the *polis* as an ethical and rhetorical justification in the case study of SRTOL, I will critique the *polis* as an ethical ground in a number of key ways. First, the democratization of skills to compete in the *polis* does not eliminate the need for political competition. I will make this critique by examining Edward Schiappa's study of Homeric *areté* (virtue) and *agôn* (contest) as central to Athenian democracy. Second, the democratic *polis* establishes deliberation as an alternative to violence, and rhetoric its weapons, when in fact deliberation is a civilized proxy for violence. Here, I will consider John Poulakos's reading of the role of sophistic rhetorical education in Athenian democracy. Most importantly, I will critique the *polis* for its maintenance of a system whereby individuals get to share in citizenship, the masses do not, and aliens come and go. The *polis*, I contend, is a political community which "assimilates every Other into the Same" (Lévinas, "Transcendence and Height" 11); Lévinas's point here is that Western philosophical traditions, which begin ontologically by universalizing the experiences of individuals, suppress the phenomenological reality of our otherness; a Lévinasian ethics does not begin in what we share, but in what we do not. The *polis* is the political expression of the ontology Lévinas opposes: it suppresses the otherness of its citizens by overwriting them as the same and when the *polis* does encounter others it assimilates, ignores, or visits violence upon them. As a result of these inconsistencies,

the *polis* has no mechanism for ethically engaging the other in its otherness and thus cannot but authorize ontological violence (e.g., physical, cultural, etc.) to enforce the same. The *polis*, the field of composition studies' community *par excellence*, is laden with an ontologically violent baggage and composition studies has no conceptual framework with which to cope with it.

This chapter works to demonstrate the field's reliance on the *polis* for its ethical truck and the trouble of such an arrangement. I begin by overviewing the history of SRTOL and then parse the progressive, liberal, and conservative responses to it. Within these responses, I consider the shared commitment to the *polis* and begin to examine the ethical inconsistency of the *polis* as the center of a rhetorical practice. The chapter ends by turning to Lévinas and his work on the ethics of responsibility, specifically his conception of community for the Other to further trouble composition studies' reliance on the *polis* and find another way forward.

B. Students' Right to Their Own Language

The Students' Right to Their Own Language movement, and the 1974 resolution of the same name, was an effort by a progressive minority within the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) to force the organization to address the multiple dialects of their new students in ways that were consistent with the progressive educational and political movements of the 1960s. The introduction to the 1974 special issue of *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) which publicized and defended the resolution to the CCCC membership, describes the resolution and special issue as the response to "a major problem confronting teachers of composition

and communication: how to respond to the variety in their students' dialects" ("Students' Right to Their Own Language" n.p.). The resolution responds to students' dialects by endorsing and protecting the students' right to speak and write as they do. The resolution asserts:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (2-3)

As Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback point out, the resolution "charges compositionists to commit to equality in the classroom" and formulates, for the first time, a compositionist response to social, economic, and racial disparities ("Introduction" viii).

The resolution and special issue is equally influenced by developments in the field of linguistics in the same period, particularly the New Linguistics movement that attempts to explain "how English actually works," taking into consideration a range of functional English grammars without judging them against an idealized, standardized form (Smitherman, "The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCCC" 9). The

politics of the 1960s and the claims of the New Linguistics collide in the SRTOL movement, Geneva Smitherman argues, and call compositionists to work on behalf of the “linguistically marginalized and economically disenfranchised voices” (12). Yet, for all its leftist appeal, Stephen Parks argues that SRTOL was ultimately an unsuccessful attempt by liberal academics to bring the progressive politics of the New Left movement of the 1960s into the discipline. Parks argues, “the SRTOL would be sufficiently scrubbed of New Left policies” in an attempt to make a palatable resolution for the CCCC (137). Even with the rounding of its progressive edges, Parks demonstrates that the resolution did not have broad support within the CCCC; he points out that the SRTOL resolution only passed because of changes to CCCC quorum rules in 1972, a change that reduced the number of voting members required to take a vote from one hundred to fifty and lowered the threshold for a vote to pass from two thirds to one half of the quorum (143-44). The resolution passed in 1974 with a vote of 79 to 20, but as Parks argues, “under previous rules, or in a better attended conference, the SRTOL could not have been voted on and probably would not have passed” (173). In this respect, SRTOL occupies an odd space in the history of the CCCC. On one hand, it is the first and only official statement from the organization on language diversity in the classroom; on the other hand, despite its official status, the resolution did and does not influence practiced pedagogy in any widely recognizable way (Bruch and Marback viii).

Why, then, are contemporary composition scholars revisiting and reconsidering SRTOL as a means to articulate a progressive history, mission, and ethics? Since 2000, over 140 references in field journals, monographs, and anthologies consider the movement. In the same period, two monographs and four anthologies treat SRTOL:

Stephen Parks overviews the influence of the progressive student movement of the 1960s on the eventual development of the SRTOL resolution in *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students' Right to Their Own Language* and Scott Wible considers the influence of composition studies on education and politics in *Shaping Language Policy in the U.S.: The Role of Composition Studies*. Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva's *Language Diversity in the Classroom*, Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback's *The Hope and the Legacy*, and Jerrie Cobb Scott, Dolores Y. Straker, Laurie Katz' *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language*, and Staci Perryman-Clark, David E. Kirkland, and Austin Jackson's *Students' Right To Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook* all collect primary documents and secondary treatments of the SRTOL in an effort to interpret the movement's relevance to contemporary practices. Confirming the resurgence of interest in SRTOL over the past decade and a half, the CCC reaffirmed its commitment to the resolution in 2014 ("CCCC Position Statements"). What nearly all of these reconsiderations of SRTOL indicate, as Bruch and Marback's introduction indicates, is that SRTOL is a means for these scholars to articulate a progressive scholarly and pedagogical disposition on behalf of the *polis*:

As two compositionists, we see writing as a resource for, and an activity of, critical hope . . . Not surprisingly, this era is also one in which the conversations that sustain us in critical hope--that help the profession and the public reflect on collective experience and deliberate the common good -- are constrained and limited. These conditions are precisely why we as a profession will be well served by returning to the legacies of hope found in conversations surrounding 'Students' Right to Their Own Language.' (vii)

Writing in the post-9/11 era of 2005, Bruch and Marback perceive the need for the *polis*' restoration through critical hope, the development of that critical hope through writing, and the recuperation of the SRTOL as an inheritance of writing's fullest potential. Making what is essentially the same argument, Stephen Parks clearly links the needs of the *polis* to the discipline's history:

a conservative disciplinary dust had settled over the activism of the 1960's, covering over and masking many of the radical actions that had enabled Composition and Rhetoric to establish itself as an independent entity within colleges and universities. As a consequence, the field had become too narrow in its aims and too distanced from the publics and populations that had animated its remarkable growth. . .

With this in mind, I wanted to produce a dissertation that would be an argument about the responsibilities of Composition and Rhetoric faculty toward the student vanishing from their classroom -- working class and working poor students of diverse heritages. (xix)²

While Parks inverts the orientation of the public and the college writer so the *polis* supplies the ethical direction to the discipline, the broader point remains: SRTOL is a touchstone for composition scholars to locate the ethical dynamics of one's rhetorical proficiency and one's role in the *polis*. While SRTOL itself is forty years old, the fact that its writers and critics then, and the contemporary scholars working on its issues now, access the *polis* points to the longevity and durability of this arrangement where the field

² It is worth noting that while working poor students of diverse heritage may be disappearing from Parks' institution they are a growing population at mine.

substantiates the ethical dimensions of teaching writing in the language of the deliberative and democratic *polis*.

C. Progressive, Liberal, and Conservative Responses

The SRTOL movement and resolution sparked intense defenses and reactions within composition studies in the 1970s and early 1980s. We can understand the debate over SRTOL as having three sets of argument: liberal arguments that share a progressive sentiment, but would continue teaching Standard American English instead of actively integrating new dialects into academic discourses; progressive arguments for the equality and full accommodation of minority dialects in the classroom; and conservative arguments that dismiss minority dialects as inferior to Standard American English. Nevertheless, viewed broadly in the fifteen years from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the progressive, liberal, and conservative positions on SRTOL share a common feature: an ethics grounded in a commitment to the *polis*. It is to this shared deployment of the *polis* as the ethical force behind their positions which I will return and critique after describing the major positions within the SRTOL debate.

The 1974 SRTOL resolution is a liberalized version of a far more progressive vision for integrating minority dialects into composition classrooms. The resolution makes broad claims about the inequitable and factually unsupportable arguments that a “standard American dialect” is a superior dialect for communicating ideas, conducting research and commerce, and serving a community (2-3). In the special issue that followed and explained the resolution, the authors ground this argument in then recent research within linguistics to explain dialects, their history and function, and how they

come to be ordered as they interact with social, economic, racial, and political dynamics (3-6). These insights lead the authors of the resolution to assert that student speakers and writers have a right to the language with which they enter the classroom and it is the responsibility of the instructor to “respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language” (3). Up to this point, progressive advocates would agree with the liberal authors of the resolution; however, when the special issue attempts to describe a pedagogical practice, it retreats from the radical implications of advancing a right to one’s own language. Specifically, in the section, “How Does Dialect Affect Employability?” the resolution attempts to develop a framework for accommodating both the implications of the resolution and the dominance of Edited American English (EAE) in the workplace. It does so first by indicating that in the workplace, spoken dialects vary greatly and any disadvantage encountered by speakers of racial or ethnic minority dialects “is often simply racial or cultural prejudice” -- an applicant who speaks a Southern white dialect chosen over a speaker of a Southern black dialect, for example (14). The special issue goes on to argue that it is the responsibility of the English teacher to teach in such a way that reverses dialect discrimination because, historically, English teachers are “in large part responsible for the narrow attitudes of today’s employers” (14). However, when the special issue turns to the matter of written dialect, it retreats, capitulating to the dominance of expectation of proficiency in written EAE (15). The argument runs that since employers expect it, we should teach it with the following caveat: “[I]t is one thing to help a student achieve proficiency in a written dialect and another thing to punish him for using variant expressions of that dialect” (15). In this framework, one’s own dialect is acknowledged and accepted but then

taught alongside preferred written dialects. Lou Kelly, writing in the first issue of CCC following the special issue on SRTOL, interprets the resolution in liberal terms, attributing social responsibilities to public institutions:

If we want to help people understand and assert some control over their own lives, if we want them to speak out, convincingly, for their human and legal rights, I think we must offer them the opportunity to learn how to convey what they think and feel about the world they live. Not only in their own language but in language that cannot be labeled illiterate and substandard. ("Is Competent Copyreading a Violation of the Students' Right to Their Own Language?" 258)

Language that "cannot be labeled illiterate and substandard" recovers the value of EAE. In brief, the Resolution and the liberal arguments which followed it imagine the field balancing the rights of students to their own language against the responsibility of instructors to prepare students for the dialect-discriminating world it helped create. Rights must be tempered by reality, or so the argument goes.

Foregrounded by critiques of bidialectalism in education in the late 1960s, the progressive reactions to SRTOL critique the resolution for its perceived accommodation of a racist and classist system and its paternalism towards speakers and writers of minority dialects. Wayne O'Neil defines and critiques bidialectalism in 1970 and lays out the essence of progressive reactions to SRTOL in 1974 as follows:

Bidialectalism . . . refers to a movement in education to systemically render lower-class students able to speak both their native dialect and standard English. . . And it offers the lower class a traditional choice: convert so that

it can progress in the ongoing social game. There is no offer to change the rules of the game or its name. (11)

For O'Neil, bidialectalism has the sheen of good public policy but inevitably acquiesces to the status quo. Geneva Smitherman makes a similar argument specifically against SRTOL almost a decade later noting that SRTOL eventually arrives at incompatible claims which she summarizes as follows: "black speech [is] structurally and functionally adequate [yet] socially and educationally inadequate" (92). Smitherman goes beyond critique, however, and advances that "we need a radically new theory of pedagogy" which begins with the assertion that "knowledge is for the people" and "it is the responsibility of the intellectual class to make this knowledge available for the people to use, not only to understand the world but to change it" (92-93). Her point is that academics are bound to their students and the public in an active, not reactionary relationship. An academic has a "moral obligation" to make available the knowledge that can change the world in a mode that people can access; anything less is an "intervention strateg[y]" into the educational lives of non-EAE speakers and writers to make them palatable to the mainstream (92-93).³ Such is John Rouse's 1979 critique of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, which in this context is taken as the quintessentially liberal enactment of the SRTOL which bridges students from where they are to where they ought to be to cope with the world. Rouse writes that a writing program like Shaughnessy's "can help produce a personality type acceptable to those who would maintain things as they are" (118). For progressive academics, SRTOL simply never goes far enough and always backs down from challenging the status quo.

³ I would like to acknowledge my colleague Kevin Carey's work on troubling the notion that education should play this kind of liberatory social role in his 2015 PhD dissertation at UIC.

Conservative reactions to SRTOL defend the status quo of EAE by making arguments for the ineffectiveness of minority dialects, the flexibility of EAE, and the rhetorical responsibility of a writer to an audience. In 1972, prior to the resolution's acceptance by the CCCC, J. Mitchell Morse makes an argument against accepting "Black English . . . as an effective medium for intellectual work"; in perhaps one of the most ferocious reactions to the SRTOL movement, Morse argues that a claim for dialect equality in fact and policy "softens the human brain" and is a "tragic delusion." He goes on to dismiss the movement as motivated by the misguided belief that "use of standard English as the only language of instruction . . . is just another white trick to keep them down." He concludes that because it is a linguistically inferior inheritance of slavery, Black English "is not a satisfactory medium for the communication of precise information or the development of clear ideas" (42). William Pixton softens Morse's argument and makes the modified claim that we need not accept the premise "that standard English is oppressive and the individual is unjustly forced to speak it." This rejection of the troublesome burden of EAE differentiates Pixton from the liberal responses and leads him to defend EAE as a possibility amongst possibilities with no requirement to "disavow the dialect of [one's] nurture". To teach EAE simply "enable[s one] to speak an intelligible version of it when [one] wishes to, to understand it at all times, and to write it when necessary" (64). For Pixton, EAE is simply what one speaks and writes at certain times. Allen Smith takes this argument a step further, making the rhetorical case that "Students do not have a right to their own language; they only have a right to learn a language which will produce the proper effects on whatever audience they may speak or write to" (78). For Smith, there is not a strict set of rules governing one "correct

standard American English” but rather an inheritance of “techniques of lightness, clarity, precision, specificity, and logic which can be borrowed” (ibid). Smith concludes that teachers are “custodians of the past” responsible for transmitting to their students the very best of human history from which they can learn (ibid). While Smith and Pixton’s arguments differ in tone from Morse, they are all versions of one another which conclude that minority dialects are not valued in the public sphere and either cannot prove or have not proved effective tools for writers and speakers with mainstream American audiences.

Predictably, the reactions to the movement toward SRTOL center on the validity of minority dialects and the responsibility of writing teachers to their students and the public. The writers of the SRTOL resolution and the special issue call the field to contend with the problematic nature of suppressing one’s own language in the classroom yet eventually concede to the perceived need for student writers and speakers to make it in a world which undervalues minority dialects and overvalues EAE. Conservative responses dismiss the version of linguistic history where EAE oppresses other dialects, advance EAE as the grand inheritance of English writers and speakers, and shift responsibility to teachers and rhetors to respond appropriately to their audience. Progressive responses begin by unapologetically calling the field to account for its role in dialect discrimination and oppression and puts the responsibility for responding in the hands of teachers and intellectuals: EAE oppresses minority dialects which are as good as anything else for intellectual work and it is the responsibility of teachers and academics to actively transpose their work into minority dialects and minority dialects into their work. The reactions I overview here typify not only the

reactions to SRTOL, but are some in a long series of installments of pedagogical moves to ground composition in citizenship and the public sphere. While what separates the different positions affects policy and pedagogy choices, all three responses to SRTOL justify their position by accessing the same set of rhetorical resources. In each, claims of rights and responsibility to the *polis* operate as the ethical framework for policy making.

D. The Shared Commitment to the *Polis*

Regardless of the position taken on SRTOL itself, the three groups ground the appropriateness of their argument in the *polis*; in all cases, the *polis* justifies what ought to be done, no matter what that might be. The resolution itself claims its imperative in the name of the nation, writing that “A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects” (3). Tucked between the claims that advocating one dialect over another is “immoral advice for humans” and the need for teachers to have training to respect diversity, the appeal to the nation answers the question of why we, in this case, should respect students’ right to their own language (3). Something about invoking the nation at this moment—which is later translated into the public, both standing in for the *polis*--apparently satisfies the writers’ need to justify the ethicality of its claims, something which the previous invocation of immorality could not. Shared humanity is not enough, it seems, to justify SRTOL’s language policy; instead, a shared commitment to and participation in a political community warrants the resolution’s claims.

This embedding of the resolution's claims within the *polis* continues in the special issue as the writers explain the need for the resolution as an intervention into a continuum of experience between the school and the public. Describing the misunderstanding of how dialects operate, the special issue indicates that the public has a vested interest in what teachers of writing do in the classroom. The writing teacher's work is not solely a disciplinary endeavor; rather, that work is the work of a citizen:

And if teachers are often uninformed or misinformed, on the subject of language, the general public is even more ignorant . . . Historians, mathematicians, and nurses all hold decided views on just what English teachers should be requiring. And through their representatives on Boards of Education and Boards of Regents, businessmen, politicians, parents, and the students themselves insist that the values taught by the schools must reflect the prejudices of the public. The English profession, then, faces a dilemma: until public attitudes can be changed . . . shall we place our emphasis on what the vocal element of the public thinks it wants or on what the actual evidence indicates we should emphasize? (1)

The special issue describes a dilemma from which the writing teacher's authority and ethical imperative derive. It is not enough that writing teachers teach what evidence supports, as would be the case in history, math, and medical sciences; rather, according to the resolution, the writing teacher's work is an ethical imperative passed to it by the public it serves. The public's *doxa* holds these unarticulated yet palpable rhetorical values, and the responsibility for their transmission transfers to the writing

teacher. Of course, the resolution attempts to intervene into these values, to make them accountable to socio-linguistic evidence; nevertheless, the resolution's venture to transform the value structure testifies to the durability of the arrangement between the public and the writing teacher. The writing teacher is professionally motivated by these values, and the public recognizes the teacher's intervention as professional, appropriate, and, moreover, the right thing to do. Later, the special issue locates this long-standing imperative in "the need for a written dialect to serve the larger, public community . . . a prose which is meant to carry information about our representative problems and interests" (5). The debate over language policy and education is never simply a disagreement over facts; it is always an argument over the writing teacher's responsibilities as a citizen to a political community even though it is the students' actions within the *polis* they ultimately seek to determine. While the debate itself wrestles to define that responsibility, I am compelled by the fact that all sides of the debate share this same understanding of what is ethically required of teachers of writing: to participate in the *polis* as a citizen.

The conservative critics, for example, defend the imperative of the status quo by articulating the value of EAE to the *polis*. Consider William Pixton's examples for dialect flexibility as evidence of EAE's neutrality. He argues that when speaking with his family, a man will use "the speech of intimacy;" when he speaks with his friends, he shifts to "the dialect shared by the larger group;" when he speaks with his trade union, "he uses the language of his trade;" but when he speaks to his trade association, "he uses standard English because it most effectively reaches the majority of American people" (64). Pixton's gender bias aside, we see the up and out nature--up from the family and

out to the public--of a dialect's function in the *polis* being tied through the economy (via the trade association) to the *polis* in the language of citizenship: when you speak to the *polis*, EAE is the language of your citizenship.⁴ Interestingly, the SRTOL special issue makes the same economic connection when it backs down from its radical edges; it is in the section "How Does Dialect Affect Employability?" that the resolution concedes that EAE must be taught as the preferred form of written expression for the marketplace and public sphere (14-15). In addition to the market, Pixton ties the writing teacher's responsibility to that other public entity, the military, through the example he chooses to explain that speaking and understanding EAE is not the same as fluency in writing EAE. He writes that without a working knowledge of written EAE, one "may believe that this sentence, 'Soldiers who are exposed to danger should receive good pay,' means the same as this one: 'Soldiers, who are exposed to danger, should receive good pay' (64-65). Through the remuneration for a soldier's service, Pixton marks teaching written EAE an ethical act because of its centrality to the student's ability to engage on important matters of public policy.

Making a similar argument for EAE's ethical possibilities in the public sphere, J. Mitchell Morse contends that teaching EAE upends an inheritance of slavery—Black English—in his article, "The Shuffling Speech of Slavery." Put differently, EAE fluency is what transforms previously enslaved persons and their descendants into participating citizens. He argues that Black English was an intentionally unintellectual dialect maintained by slave owners, and later opponents of integrated schools, to control dissent and self-advocacy. He writes:

⁴ Add a footnote about the ancient notion of style, here style is an alibi for EAE.

It [Black English] doesn't lend itself to clear expression. It was the language of slavery. It was taught to illiterate slaves by illiterate overseers, whose language it was. Of course slave owners didn't object to its inadequacy for intellectual communication; they were amused, not distressed, by the imprecision of their slaves' thought. . . . The conservative opposition to integrated schools springs from fear that the races may become less easy to play off against each other; conservatives are quite right to fear 'uppity niggers' who speak clearly and eloquently; they much prefer Black English, a language of imprecision, the heritage of slavery. (43)

For Morse, EAE is not simply the preferred form for the *polis*; EAE is the language of opposition to slavery, segregation, and racism and Black English opposes full citizenship. While Morse may be correct that BE isn't/wasn't an adequate mode for self-advocacy and critique in the public sphere, its inadequacy is tied to the perceptions of the dialect, not an actual linguistic or political deficit. So Morse may have a pragmatic point, but that's not the argument he's making. Rather, he argues the point that the "literate black leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" are those who "spoke and wrote eloquent standard English", leading him to ask, "can the advocates of Black English name one black leader or spokesperson with more than a neighborhood following who habitually expresses himself in Black English?" (43). Notice here Morse activates the same framework as Pixton where one dialect is all good and fine for the family, the neighborhood, or the trade association; however, if a speaker needs to access the *polis* to advocate for socio-political change, it must be done in EAE and

advocates of Black English do their students a political disservice to not teach it. Here, the dialect you speak is tied up in your role in the *polis* as either citizen or slave.

The progressive critics of SRTOL make the same argument as its conservative detractors, that one's dialect is central to one's political future in the *polis*, but in reverse. Whereas conservative critics pin one's full citizenship to one's fluency in EAE, the progressive critics argue for the use of non-standard dialects as the dialect of democratic change. For Geneva Smitherman, for example, the ethical imperative for language education ought to shift from teaching the "norms of speech etiquette and linguistic politeness of the white middle class" to "liberation education and language programs that teach black students the use of language as a tool for critical analysis and examination of their class status in American society" (92). Here, one's own dialect, Black English in Smitherman's case, becomes the driver of a particular type of democratic participation through a thorough-going critique of the existing order. Further, Smitherman criticizes researchers of Black English who demonstrated its linguistic structure but who did not argue "for policies and institutional supports for its use and acceptance in the public domain" (95). In this way, dialect becomes a proxy for who is and who is not enabled to participate in the *polis*, who is and who is not a citizen based on dialect. As we saw in the conservative reactions, Smitherman charges language educators with the ethical responsibility of enabling participation in the *polis*. Of course, which dialect to teach and what political participation looks like differs, but the point remains: there is a consensus that language educators and the dialect fluency they do or do not teach have political ramifications; it is because of these political ramifications that language teaching and learning take on an ethical imperative. John Rouse makes

precisely this point in his critique of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* when he argues that any writing program is either promoting or disrupting a political status quo. He writes, "the continued survival of any power structure requires the production of certain personality types. The making of an English program becomes, then, not simply an educational venture but a political act" (105), and later, "Any decision about language teaching is a moral and political decision" (118).

The SRTOL debate brings into focus two central premises. First, the teaching of writing in a particular dialect is tied to the *polis*. One is not simply fluent in EAE or Black English and that's that. For each critic or advocate of SRTOL, dialect fluency is directly tied to one's ability to participate in a political community as a citizen or outsider. Second, dialect fluency's role in the *polis* activates an ethical imperative within the teaching of writing. As observed in the SRTOL debate, teachers of writing are ethically bound to their practice in a way that exceeds their disciplinary obligation and expertise. Because one's dialect fluency has everything to do with one's inclusion or exclusion from the democratic *polis*--because one's full citizenship seems to hang in the balance--writing and its teaching are the means by which people enact their ethical obligations to one another. This shared commitment to the *polis* as the ethical ground for the teaching of writing, however, is a poor fit as the *polis* seems to always bring with it the skewed rationale of conflict and survival as the organizing principles of public life.

E. The Inconsistent Ethics of the *Polis*

To make the argument for the ethical untenability of the *polis* as demonstrated in the SRTOL debate, I will shift our attention to work being done in rhetorical theory and

criticism to recover the sophistic tradition of rhetoric. This move from composition studies to rhetorical theory is necessary, I contend, because they are a part of the same impulse to locate a rhetor's, or a rhetorician's, ethics in the *polis*. My concern is not, primarily, with how the Greek notion of the *polis* operates as an ethical practice, but rather how contemporary rhetoricians take up the sophistic tradition in order to ground the ethicality of their own neo-sophistic practices in the Greek *polis*. I am examining the reception of the *polis* for its potential as an ethical warrant; and from the vantage point of contemporary rhetorical theory, we can more easily see the limits of this *polis*-driven ethicality. In particular, we can observe in the work of Edward Schiappa and John Poulakos that an ethical rhetorical practice theorized in the *polis* inconsistently manages the relationship between *arête* and *agôn* as an ethical footing. This inconsistency leads to the maintenance of a hierarchical system of citizens, others, and aliens the organizing principle of which is *agôn*. First, however, I will establish the connections between the polis, ethics, and the recovery of sophistic rhetoric in contemporary rhetorical studies by considering Edward P.J. Corbett, Susan Jarratt, and Steven Mailloux.

We can observe the alignment of sophistry, the *polis*, and ethics appearing again and again in the history of contemporary rhetorical studies. In *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Edward P.J. Corbett's first move in introducing sophism differentiates the ethical sophists he discusses from the unethical sophists that stain the term. He writes that while the mercurial work of later itinerant educators "gave Sophists an unsavory reputation and made 'sophistry' a synonym for deceitful reasoning . . . men like Isocrates were highly ethical, with noble ideals and unimpeachable standards of

intellectual integrity” (491). Here, Corbett’s concern is the reputations of early sophists besmirched by their “charlatan” descendants (491). For Corbett, recovering sophism is about salvaging the reputations of good men who serve the *polis* by teaching the arts of persuasion. The difference between men like Isocrates and unethical sophists is the former’s dedication to the democratic and rhetorical process of deliberation. Two and a half decades after Corbett’s intervention on behalf of sophism’s nobility and intellectual integrity, Susan Jarratt’s expresses a quite different concern about common misunderstandings of sophistic ethics and rhetorical practice.

For Jarratt, the recovery of sophistic practices goes beyond recovering sullied reputations and questionable commitments to democracy; rather, sophism’s recovery plays a central role in understanding rhetoric’s commitment to the *polis*. Jarratt writes as follows:

The emergence of democracy in fifth-century B.C. Athens, demanding broader participation in government and legal affairs, created the need for a kind of secondary education designed to prepare young men for public life in the *polis* . . . (xv)

The first sophists took on the teaching of rhetoric for democratic purposes, according to Jarratt, and were particularly effective because of their core principle that “notions of ‘truth’ had to be adjusted to fit the ways of a particular audience in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs and laws” (xv). This notion of truth’s mutability is at the center of Jarratt’s concern that sophistic ethics are under historical scrutiny beginning with Plato and Aristotle and in the inheritance of their critique in James Murphy and

George Kennedy.⁵ Jarratt attempts to disambiguate sophistic practices not as ethically-compromised lessons in style, the performance of oratorical power, or the “amoral manipulation of an audience,” but rather as an early and misunderstood articulation of the social nature of language and its impact on knowledge--the full comprehension of which is central to operating a democracy (xvi). To make this claim, Jarratt describes how sophistic rhetoric exceeds the limits of philosophy; she writes:

A revised view would . . . ask whether and how the sophists answer the questions treated by “philosophy”: what are the origins of life and thought, how can knowledge be defined, and what is “reality”. The crucial difference from Plato and Aristotle is that the sophists made possible an additional question . . . : how does language create different answers to those questions at different moments in history? (xviii)

For Jarratt, sophistic rhetoric’s attunement to the needs of a community make it an ethical instructional practice for supporting the democratic principles of the *polis*; the *polis* needs good ideas and the sophists train citizens in making good, socially-contextualized arguments for them. Democracy needs deliberation and rhetoricians teach the deliberative art. Whereas Corbett defends the virtue of early sophists, Jarratt recovers the ethicality of their methods and proposes that those methods exceed what classical philosophy can accomplish for the democratic *polis*.

Whereas Jarratt champions the sophists for grounding ethical choices in the deliberative community, in *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism*, Steven Mailloux recognizes that the problem with grounding ethics in sophistic methodology is the always present

⁵ *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric* and *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, respectively.

possibility of “political quietism, because it provides no objective basis for ethical choice . . .” (3). Here, Mailloux recognizes the tenuousness of a fully contingent ethics. As his title suggests, Mailloux interrogates the alignment between sophistry and pragmatism, plumbing the proximity between the two for a rhetorical theory that clarifies sophism and pragmatism’s flexible ethical foundation. Like Jarratt, Mailloux finds his way to the *polis* to ground sophism’s and pragmatism’s ethicality. First, the pragmatist Mailloux privileges the practical debate between progressive and reactionary politics as one with material ends over the theoretical dog-fight between foundationalism and antifoundationalism. In other words, Mailloux establishes positive, verifiable, and visible goals as ethical benchmarks, rather than only replay the philosophical arguments for and against foundationalist claims. Mailloux then points to pragmatic negotiation and deliberation within the polity as that which will get good work done. He writes as follows:

It [contingent ethics acquired in deliberation] requires a lot of give-and-take in rhetorical negotiation. It cannot be guaranteed by either rhetoric or philosophy, by rhetorical pragmatism or foundationalist theory. However, some of us working in the pragmatist tradition think that at this historical moment a strategic emphasis on the first term in each of those pairs might enhance the effectiveness of progressive political activity. . . (21)

As only a pragmatist could, Mailloux points to the need for deliberation and concession in the democratic body. Here, Mailloux is important in contrast to Corbett or Jarratt (all three prominent examples of the recovery of sophistic rhetoric) because he fixes our attention on the *polis* as the site of an ethically consistent, rhetorical methodology. We do not need a firmly theoretical ground for ethical action, his theory goes; we need a

deliberative rhetorical practice that can produce ethical social action. In Jarratt and Mailloux, we see what writing studies' uptake of sophistic rhetoric attempts to accomplish: to avoid wading into an old argument between philosophy and rhetoric about truth and truth-claims, rhetoric enables deliberation toward ethical options. If sophism and the weight it brings from antiquity can settle rhetoric's ethics in the democratic community and ultimately avoid answering philosophy's first question, then the *polis* can stand as rhetoric's god term. What Susan Jarratt skirts, Mailloux problematizes, but only to acknowledge that there's not much more for pragmatists, neosophists, or rhetoricians to do about it; if rhetoric is to be an ethical practice, it is only to be so within the contingent constraints of the deliberative *polis*.

Deliberation and the democratization of rhetorical skills (*aretê*) to compete (*agôn*) in the *polis*, however, does nothing to eliminate the need for a competition in the first place. If the rhetorical arts are but a preferable substitute for violence, the logic of war is still in play along with its ethical baggage. Deliberation, then, presents itself as an ethical practice to avoid violence, but is in fact a civilized mode of negotiating *agôn* which maintains the hierarchy of the *polis*. In *Protagoras and Logos*, Edward Schiappa overviews the democratization of homeric *aretê* (skill, excellence) by the sophists, but, as we will observe, this does little to challenge the competition over resources (tangible and intangible) within the *polis*.

Schiappa's description of sophistic education in the fifth-century includes a description of how Plato's use of *aretê* as value contrasts with Homer's use of *aretê* as skill or excellence, and that it is Homer's *aretê* which Protagoras democratizes. Schiappa begins by describing Plato's *aretê* as an objective of education which would

exhibit itself as one's willingness to "[help] one's friend and [harm] one's enemies" (168). Prior to Plato's deployment, however, *aretê* in Homer's hands meant something quite different; Schiappa summarizes Homer's *aretê* as follows: "Most of all it meant to best others in whatever *agôn* (contest) one competed" (168). Notice how the conversion of *aretê* from violence (i.e., harm) to contest does not shrug off violence, but first civilizes it and then offers it up as status, a means of getting and then keeping standing in civic life. Schiappa indicates that Homeric *aretê* was tangible, observable in outcomes (speed, success, strength, etc.) and its civic life was lived in the noble and highly-born where inherited wealth, power, and status evidence naturalized *aretê* (169). Schiappa then connects *aretê* in the nobility to their standing in the *polis* which corroborates a reading of the state as in a constant fight for its own survival. Here, he quotes A.W.H. Adkins:

The primary function of any state is to survive, and to prosper as well as it may. . . To ensure survival, the will and ability to resist, coupled with good counsel, are the most evident necessities. In a hoplite-oligarchy, or any society in which the individual must buy his own fighting equipment, the most effective striking force is supplied by the rich. . . (169)

Thus, when contemporary rhetorician Schiappa turns to describe the changing nature of *aretê* in the hands of the sophists like Protagoras, his point is that the sophists made arguments for education and democracy which began to dramatically reimagine who is enabled to participate in the *polis*. He calls this the "democratization of *aretê*" (169) and offers up a justification for the contemporary field's neo-sophistic practices; but while Homeric *aretê* shifts from an inheritance from one's lineage to a teachable *technê* in the

hands of the sophists (170), and while it is a laudable shift away from rule by the few to rule by the many, the current uptake of sophistic *aretê* does little to change Homer's initial violent characterization of *aretê* as the ability to best any other in whatever *agôn* comes along. The sophists, nor neo-sophists, do not reimagine the primary concern of the state as anything other than its own survival.

Take as a further example Schiappa's discussion of Protagoras's mythic defense of the teachability of *aretê*:

Once upon a time there were gods only, and no mortal creatures. But when the time came that these also should be created, the gods fashioned them out of earth and fire and various mixtures of both elements in the interior of the earth; and when they were about to bring them into the light of day, they ordered Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip them . . . There were some to whom he gave strength without swiftness, while he equipped the weaker with swiftness; some he armed and others he left unarmed . . .

Thus did he compensate them with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct. (Plato 25)

Notice that in Protagoras's myth *agôn* is central to life; one must be equipped to survive against other living things in an ongoing contest. This, so it seems, is what it means to live. Schiappa's goal here is to see the conceptual transformation of *aretê* from an inherited value to a teachable skill, and thus use this sophistic conceptual shift as a warrant for neo-sophistic practices. Schiappa's paraphrase of the myth continues as follows:

Epimetheus had overlooked humans, whom Prometheus discovered naked and unready for survival. So from Hephaestus and Athena, Prometheus stole the ‘wisdom in the arts’ (*tên entechnon sophian*) together with fire and gave them to humanity. . . Further, through their skill humans discovered speech (*phônê*) and names (*onomata*) and provided themselves with life’s necessities. (180)

Following the dual gifts of the arts and fire, humans’ discovery of speech and names parallels their ability to provide for themselves. Here, the fire seems the most useful in navigating the *agôn* of life as the rhetorical arts are of little value against a harsh landscape or an approaching predator. Yet, without a field on which to deploy them, the arts are a gift without a purpose and fire is not enough to ensure survival until Zeus intervenes:

Thus provided, mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities. But the consequence was that they were destroyed by wild beasts. . . After a while the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities; but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they evil intreated one another . . . Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliation. (Plato 26)

Key here is the metonymic relationship drawn between the rhetorical arts, politics, respect and justice, and the city. First, politics is poised as the solution to being “nearly wiped out” as the political tools for organizing humans allow for collective protection,

something the arts could not accomplish; yet, and this is second, the *politikê technê* which organize are *aidôs* and *dikê*. Respect and justice are slotted in as the *aretê* required to survive and thrive in the *agôn* of life--and here we return to that slipperiness between Platonic and Homeric *aretê*. As Schiappa points out, for Protagoras *aretê* is not a value, but a skill and this is the conceptual transformation necessary to deploy *aidôs* and *dikê* as tools, weapons, organizing possibilities, i.e., *politikê technê*. Third, respect and justice become indispensable to participating in the life of the city, so much so that the incapability of learning them will lead to one's death. Importantly, the humans who initiate Protagoras's myth in their struggle for survival are transformed at the end of the myth into the *polis*, the political and rhetorical body required to survive. Thus, we observe Protagoras drawing *agôn* as a justifying thread through the rhetorical arts, politics, respect and justice, and the *polis*, for it is *agôn* which necessitates each at every step of the mythic development: the arts alone cannot sustain humans against predators; politics is needed to organize human defenses; respect and justice are the tools of that organization; and the city embodies this newly formed defensive machine.

The contemporary engagement of the sophistic *polis* as the solution to rhetoric's problem with ethics cannot escape the *polis*'s inheritance of *agôn* as violence, even as they seek to redeploy it. And while some, like John Poulakos, are satisfied in concluding that "the sophists' motto was not the survival of the fittest but fitting as many as possible for survival" (14), this arrangement does little to establish a consistently ethical model for rhetoric. Notice, for example, what Poulakos's description of the sophist's contribution to democracy does not do, namely alleviate *agôn* as organizing principle or the social hierarchy it enables:

In this sense, the sophists can be said to have helped strengthen the recently instituted democracy by forging a mentality aware of the centrality of persuasion in the coordination of sociopolitical action and the resolution of human conflicts. At the very least, this mentality was consistent with the partial empowerment of the traditionally weak and the partial disempowerment of the hitherto powerful. Insofar as the sophists enabled more people to enter the contests and spectacles of public life, the rhetoric they taught created at least two new possibilities: first, the possibility of the weaker challenging the stronger; and second, the possibility of revitalizing calcified discursive practices. Together, these two possibilities created a new world, simultaneously contesting the one already in place. (14-15)

While Poulakos reads these developments as positive--and I certainly do not dispute that a partial redistribution of power from the few to the many is better than its opposite--there is also a deep limitation to the democratic accomplishments of an education in the rhetorical arts: sociopolitical action is coordinated; human conflicts are resolved, albeit temporarily; the weak are partially empowered and the strong partially disempowered; but, most importantly, the contest of public life remains. Schiappa critiques Poulakos for an exaggerated reading of the sophists' radicality, noting that "[e]ven in its most radical form Athenian democracy limited citizenship to a minority of the adult population, retained the institution of slavery, and was thoroughly misogynistic" (171). So even if we accept Poulakos' exaggerated reading of the sophists' upheaval of Athenian public life through a rhetorical education, it is still inconsistent. Its ethical warrant only ever returns to the *polis* and the increased likelihood of success in the public's contest.

F. Conclusion: Turning to the Other

If I have successfully troubled the longstanding ethical warrant for the fields of rhetoric and composition, might there be other ways to imagine the ethicality of rhetoric? In his earliest writing, Lévinas points to the problem of the *polis* (which for Lévinas is the socialist or homogenous state) and its refusal to see in the I or the citizen its irreducible alterity; instead, the *polis* hinges on the ideals of universalism and equality which, as Lévinas argues, are never more than a plane on which two equal egos compete:

In a homogenous or socialist society, the central concern is how to confer on the Other (Autrui) the status of the I and how to liberate the I from the alienation that comes to it from the injustice that it commits. The right of man, which must be recognized, is the right of an I. Man is conceived of as an I or as a citizen -- but never in the irreducible originality of his alterity, which one cannot have access to through reciprocity and symmetry.

Universality and egalitarian law result from the conflicts in which one primitive egoism opposes another. ("Transcendence and Height" 14)

His point is that the state which operates to preserve the idealized, universalized individual is forever charged with transforming the Other into the same, and then maintains an equalized field for competition between egos. In such a state, universality and egalitarianism transmute violence, civilize it; yet, as Lévinas describes, the suppression of violence always requires violence:

But war and administration, that is to say, hierarchy, through which the State is instituted and maintained, alienate the Same, which they were supposed to maintain in its purity; in order to suppress violence, it is necessary to have recourse to violence. ("Transcendence and Height" 15)

For Lévinas, this system makes a fundamental, ontological error: it assumes that the first order of being is the pre-existence of the I, the individual who is separate yet similar to all other "I"s. Lévinas's phenomenology, however, upends this model of being and argues instead that it is the Other's otherness that emerges first in the ontological and ethical equation. We are not equal because we are separate, yet fundamentally the same; our ethical responsibility does not derive from our similarity.

Instead, Lévinas's ontology begins with an ethical relation where everything I am depends on my relationship with the other. I am called into being, Lévinas argues, in an encounter with an Other and the only thing we fundamentally share is that we are not the same. This encounter, he writes, "puts me into question, empties me of myself and empties me without end" ("Meaning and Sense" 52). In the moment that I speak to an other, I do not hail a comprehensible equal. Rather, my engagement with the other empties me of everything except our mutual alterity. The only thing I have for myself is the ontological condition that I am not you; but, Lévinas argues, this emptiness is the richest of resources for from it I come to be. Thus, my very being depends on my boundedness to the Other and this, Lévinas argues, is ethics. Our response to each other is also our responsibility for each other: "The one for whom I am responsible is also the one to whom I have to respond," Lévinas writes ("Transcendence and Height" 19).

This responsibility between others offers a starting point for rethinking rhetoric's ethicality. Unlike the *polis* which transforms our otherness into sameness, civilizes our violence into discourse, and all the while keeps violence at the ready, Lévinas's ontology is a resource for reimagining rhetoric as the ethical condition itself. As Lévinas writes, "To be in relation with the other (*autrui*) face to face is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse" ("Is Ontology Fundamental?" 9). The next chapter abandons the *polis* as an ethical warrant for writing studies and considers the work of Lévinas as a means to rethink the ethicality of rhetoric, or the rhetoricity of ethics. The chapter overviews attempts in rhetorical studies broadly (specifically in the disciplines of rhetoric, composition, and communication) to activate Lévinas within the field. Within these attempts, I identify a number of *topoi* that act as rhetorical resources for managing Lévinas's ethical paradigms within rhetorical studies.

III. PARABLES OF THE IMPOSSIBLE OR, THE APPROACHING OTHER

“The infinity of alterity is instructive in clarifying the impossibility of theorizing ethics.”

(Gehrke 12)

A. The Argument

In Chapter Two, I demonstrate through the case study of Students’ Right to Their Own Language that composition studies finds itself at the limit of its ethical imagination, justifying its ethical practices by service to the *polis*. I argue that the perception of the *polis* as the primary means by which to ground the field’s ethicality is limiting and always returns us to a crass vision of ethicality where individualized success in the public sphere may just benefit the whole. This chapter continues where Chapter Two ends and turns to an ethic/rhetoric of the other as the site of new resources for imagining the ethical work of rhetoric and composition. Nevertheless, grounding the field’s work in Lévinas’s phenomenology is not without its own set of complications. In this chapter, my task is to trace out how to imagine rhetoric as ethics, or ethics as rhetoric, by finding the “linguistic resources which make available the impossibility of addressing the Other” (Critchley 29). For my purposes, linguistic resources are the *topoi* which designate the limits of ethical relations and are therefore the possible means to foreground the always-present Face of the escaping Other. I selected the four texts—Amit Pinchevski’s *By Way of Interruption: Lévinas and the Ethics of Communication*, Janis Haswell, Richard Haswell, and Glenn Blalock’s “Hospitality in Composition Courses,” Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes’s “Flattening Effects: Composition’s Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence,” and Johanna Hartelius’s “Face-

ing Immigration: Prosopopeia and the ‘Muslim-Arab-Middle Eastern’ Other” —for three reasons: first, they represent an intra-disciplinary interest from rhetoric, communication, and composition in Lévinas’s work; second, they shift away from a strictly philosophical engagement and move to consider how addressing the Other impacts rhetorical practices; third, they employ a set of *topoi* which are all different, yet share the same impulse to activate obligation to the Other with a discursive paradigm. This chapter will evidence the ways in which the field has troped the Other by considering five *topoi* that manage the Other both in SRTOL and in contemporary rhetorical scholarship over the past decade.

In particular, this chapter I will consider the following *topoi*, *topoi* which I have named as such, not their authors: the *topoi* of the incommensurable and response-ability emerge in Pinchevski’s treatment of the limits of communication; hospitality as a *topos* for managing Otherness appears in Hartelius’s work; and I consider the *topoi* of identity in Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock, and the alien in Alexander and Rhodes. Each, I argue, illuminates both the obligation to and the functional impossibility of approaching the Other in discourse. These *topoi* share an attempt to provide discursive structures (what Critchley calls, “linguistic resources”) that make the Other available, open to discussion and consideration; at the same time, these *topoi* evidence the impossibility of this approach in language. They open the Other to discussion and in so doing demonstrate the Other’s incommensurability with discourse.

As such, these *topoi* take up the task of our ethical condition, described by Diane Davis in *Inessential Solidarity* as the obligation of solidarity evidenced in writing. Davis writes, “The task given to ‘us,’ in the name of solidarity, is to expose exposedness, ‘to

expose the unexposable *in*,' as [Jean-Luc] Nancy puts it . . . This exposition takes place in writing and through writing. . . a sharing that testifies to the shattering limit by 'touching' it" (loc. 140). I submit that the *topoi* of incommensurability, response-ability, hospitality, identity, and the alien "expose exposedness" are a starting place for rethinking the field's ethicality following Lévinas's lead.

B. Lévinasian Ethics, A Resource for Re-Thinking Rhetoric

Lévinas's ethics are unlike most works of ethical philosophy in that they do not stake out a system for arriving at ethically-consistent (perhaps morally-consistent is a better term here) decisions or actions. An ethical phenomenologist, Lévinas's first order is always to describe the circumstances of our ethical condition, that our way of being is always caught up in relations, a relationship which he calls ethical. It is the notion of being that is both inherited from and pulling away from Heidegger. Heidegger's work troubles the idea of a transcendent, fixed individual in favor of an ontology of always coming into being; in contrast, Lévinas's work refuses Western philosophy's preoccupation with locating the individual as the ontological center altogether, whether assumed or coming-to-be, and proposes a different kind of being that is always in relation with an Other, not fixed by one's own subjectivity but thrust into subjectivity by the Other. Simon Critchley summarizes this ethical reimagining this way: ". . . ethics occurs as the putting into question of the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness, or what Lévinas, following Plato, calls the Same (*le meme*; *to auton*). . . the Same is called into question by the other" (4-5). It is from between these two terms, the same and the other, that Lévinas works out his ethical philosophy. I will expand on each below

and then take up two other key Lévinasian concepts that emerge in the interplay of the same and the other: the saying and the said.

The first section of Lévinas's most important text, *Totality and Infinity*, takes up the idea of the same and the other in detail as they are the centerpiece of his metaphysical ontology. Again, it is important to recognize that in the same and the other Lévinas charts a different course not just for ethical philosophy, but Western philosophy generally. In Lévinas's work, the I is foremost a response to an Other, that is to say, a disposition towards an Other is the primary disposition of experience. Prior to that encounter, there are many things--hunger and desire, for example--but not a subject. Such a disposition, this turning towards, or what Lévinas calls the "Desire for the Invisible" is not simply one of many acts available to an individual. Instead, my "longing for the Other," as Drew Dalton puts in his book (*Longing For the Other*), is unique because it escapes my ability to contain it and because it precedes and enables my very sense of self.

For Lévinas, the other is not something I can capture, hold, own, or colonize. The Other is always a specific other (this Other or that Other) and completely beyond me; as Lévinas writes, despite all my longing for it, the Other is never mine:

The other metaphysically desired is not "other" like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this "I," that "other." . . . The metaphysical desire tends towards *something else entirely*, towards the *absolutely other*. (TI 33, emphasis in original)

This recognition of absolute otherness, and this is key, is the first move of my experience beyond myself, the first gesture that points up and outward, past my survival, my safety, my pleasure. The fact that I first recognize this alterity in an other and then long for it is my first act of sociality. And my sociality is always opening, always longing; it is a “desire without satisfaction,” Lévinas writes, “which precisely, *understands [entend]* the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other” (*TI* 34, emphasis in original). Simply put, the Other is unassimilable; it is always other.

My always longing for an other precedes and anticipates my subjectivity, my I. Put more strongly, the other gives me the “I” to speak. Prior to my desire for the other, I am unthinkable. My encounter with an Other changes all of that; it calls me into a relationship with it, and out of that relationship my subjectivity emerges. This is where Lévinas’s phenomenology breaks from Western philosophy because the I is not the first move here; crucially, I is the second move. I is an experience that follows an encounter with the Other. I’ll stress again that Lévinas does not refer to an abstracted other here; he means an embodied encounter with a specific Other, between you and me, for example.

This emergence of the subject as a departure from the Other is what Lévinas names the Same and describes as “The Breach of Totality” where the experience with alterity (the total Other) is disrupted in attempts to name and describe it (*TI* 35). In Lévinasian terms, the Same is that which returns from an encounter with the total Other marked precisely as not Other; the breach of totality, then, references the pulling away and loss of the Other in the Same which is also the only means to address the Other in any way. The experience of longing for the Other is an infinite, consuming one and any

self-conscious attempt to account for it breaks from infinite obligation and attempts to enclose the Other within a manageable totality. The I operates at this limit in that it names the experience with alterity but also marks its incommensurability with the Other; it is both an opening and a closing. Lévinas describes the fundamental break between the Other and the subject as follows:

. . . the radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence of this going with this return. Otherwise the same and the other would be reunited under one gaze, and the absolute distance that separates them filled in.

(*TI* 36)

Which is not to valorize the other and demonize the same; instead, Lévinas's aim here is to describe the phenomenon of human experience in its ethicality, that is to say its relationality. The same and the other can never be "reunited under one gaze," as Lévinas puts it; they must always remain in a relationship of complete alterity--and thankfully so because this ethicality, this relationship with alterity, gives me all I have to go on.

It is because of the absolute alterity of the other that when I inevitably retract from my encounter with an Other, I depart with a gift: myself. The other gives me myself, a gift that activates and enables the I to be in the world. Incommensurable though it may be with the Other, the I testifies to the approach of the Other and carries

my subjectivity back into the world. Lévinas writes that this encounter with the other produces the I “as a *sojourn* [*séjour*] in the world;” it sends the I back to us:

The way of the I against the “other” of the world consists in *sojourning*, in *identifying oneself* by existing here *at home with oneself* [*chez soi*]. . . It finds in the world a site [*lieu*] and a home [*maison*]. . . The “at home” [Le “chez soi”] is not a container but a site where *I can*, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, free. (*TI* 34, emphasis in original)

Notice here how Lévinas ties the experience with alterity to the sojourn of the I back into the world; this opportunity for the I is both a function of its dependence on the Other and at the same time the source of the I’s freedom. The I can speak because of the Other, and this, Lévinas argues, is what makes the human condition ethical: “Everything is here, everything belongs to me,” Lévinas writes. “I am at home with myself in the world because it [the Other] offers itself to or resists possession” (*TI* 37-38). Produced in the encounter with alterity is the tension where obligation enables my subjectivity, which is perhaps the best definition of Lévinasian ethics: ethics names our phenomenological condition of being caught between the unending obligation to the Other and a freedom to speak “I” which the Other enables.

At this point, it’s worth pausing for a moment to consider Lévinas’s unusual articulation of the term freedom, as it does not mean what most of us trained in the Western liberal tradition take it to mean. Freedom, for Lévinas, is not what is inscribed in charters and declarations, say like the U.N.’s “Declaration of Universal Human

Rights,” which asserts that individuals appear in the world with an “inherent dignity” and “equal and inalienable rights,” both of which are the origin of one’s freedom and claim to “justice and peace in the world” (“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights”).

Freedom is not, for Lévinas, that state of being in the world circumscribed by a freedom of belief, speech, conscience, action, or inaction, predicated on equality. Rather, for Lévinas, freedom predicates itself on a deep inequity that appears in the Jewish tradition where the freedom that comes of being the people of YHWH is a freedom born of unbreachable responsibility. Jill Robbins expounds on this notion of freedom in her review of Lévinas’s *Difficult Freedoms*:

The title of *Difficult Freedom* . . . is itself an instance of reinscription. It refers to a rabbinical pun . . . on a phrase from Exodus 32:16, ‘And the writing was the writing of God, graven (*harut*) on the tablets.’ The rabbinical commentator suggests an alternative vocalization for the consonantal text, in a spirit not of serious editorial emendation, but of playful exegesis: ‘Read not *harut* (graven) but *herut* (freedom), for thou wilt find no free man save him who is engaged in the study of Torah’ (*Pirke Aboth* 6:2). This paronomastic reading affirms something as contradictory in its terms as heteronomous freedom. For Lévinas, the distinguishing feature of Judaism is freedom, albeit a weighty freedom made up of obligations, a difficult freedom. . . . Inscribed on the tablets given at Mount Sinai . . . inscribed in the differential play of inscription itself, is an unbreachable responsibility. (Robbins 1055-56)

The rabbinical commentator's point is that Torah, particularly the study of Torah, is at the same time the site of freedom and obligation. It's neither a freedom to do as one pleases, nor a freedom from the whims of others; rather, and this is the sense of it that Lévinas adopts, freedom is the opportunity to be obligated for it is in first being obligated that one achieves a subjectivity which can experience obligation and anything else that may follow. Importantly, Lévinas lodges this articulation of freedom and obligation in the rabbinical tradition of studying the Torah, and in this specific case, the possibilities of language and interpretation in the midrashic tradition.⁶

As a resource for rhetorical studies, the notion of obligation and freedom—in other words, that to speak “I” indexes both my dependency on the Face of the Other and the genesis of my ability to speak for myself—as the dual starting points for subjectivity is meaningful because the enactment of that obligation--the opportunity for freedom, the encounter with an other--takes place in language. Diane Davis' argues that an always prior rhetoricity—an ability to be persuaded—is the precondition for obligation; this “persuadability,” as Davis calls it, names the emergence of community where persons encounter the other and “where egos are shattered” (*Inessential Solidarity* loc. 171 emphasis in original). The subject, Davis continues, does not respond to alterity (it does not arrive prepared to encounter others), rather “‘the subject’ is the response to alterity” (loc 222). Davis demonstrates that inessential solidarity points to rhetoric's fundamental ethicality because rhetoric's first act is to demand persons confront alterity, and all this prior to discourse. Everything after that, however, takes place in language. As Lévinas puts it, the relationship with the Other is “the situation of

⁶ It's important to note that instead of working from the Talmud, other readers of Lévinas's notion of freedom work from Heidegger.

discourse” (*BPW* 9). Obligation takes place in the possibility of language, the opening of one language-using animal to another’s persuasion. To map out the complex linguistic nature of our ethical being, Lévinas introduces the concepts of the saying and the said and it is therein that we can map a clearer conception of rhetoricity folded into Lévinasian ethics.

The saying, Lévinas writes, “signifies prior to essence, prior to identification” (*Otherwise Than Being* 45). For Lévinas, essence and identification are twinned phenomena which transcribe the experience of the saying as a said. The saying, for Lévinas, is precisely that which appears prior to its own transcription, that experience of alterity which announces itself as one who is not the one who beholds it. It is the performative possibility of connection, of obligation, of encountering an other. Simon Critchley, in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, succinctly describes the saying as follows:

The Saying is my exposure -- corporeal, sensible -- to the Other, my inability to refuse the Other’s approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the Other. It is a verbal or non-verbal ethical performance, whose essence cannot be caught in constative propositions. It is a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to constative description. (7, emphasis in original)

The saying is both the bridge between the other and me and the compulsion to cross. The saying is the very possibility of language. It is not the content of a greeting, let’s say, that matters here, but rather that the other binds me into a relationship that enables and compels me to respond. A wave, a nod, a “hey there,” a cold stare, all are indices of

my obligation to you. Whether I like it or not, the Other catches me in the saying and drives me into an encounter, into an obligation, into freedom. Recall here that we are not working in the liberal imaginary here. Freedom for Lévinas is the opportunity for a subject to be obligated for that obligation offers up that subjectivity in the first place. And we can phrase this formation either way: the subject's freedom is an obligation as much as the subject's obligation is a freedom. Alterity gives me me and therefore everything is possible in language and yet the possibility of language binds me to you without end.⁷ Obligation knows no limit. The saying, Lévinas writes, establishes a "relationship with a neighbor" which is precisely a "responsibility for the neighbor" that "no longer [has] any limit or measure for this responsibility" (*OTB* 47). From here on out, language practices and performs our ethical obligation without end, and in those linguistic resources everything and anything is possible.

For this reason, the said is not so much the opposite of the saying, but its residue. "The said, the appearing, arises in the saying," Lévinas writes in *Otherwise Than Being* (46). Simon Critchley defines the said as "the content of my words, their identifiable meaning" (*The Ethics of Deconstruction* 7). These are not opposing definitions: words, content, meaning rise out of our engagement with the saying, and while these things inevitably begin our retraction from the other, they are nevertheless the means of our freedom. The said is the work of the I in the world, or, as Lévinas puts it, "To enter into being and truth is to enter into the said. . . ." (*OTB* 45). So the said is words and meaning, but more so the cracks and breaks through which the saying, and with it truth and being, tries to slip into the world. They are never the saying, but

⁷ Lévinas's take on maieutics will be treated more fully later in this chapter.

nevertheless they enable the possibility of remembering the saying in the world. The said carries with it the hopeless burden of testifying to the saying, to laying down linguistic structures that carry the burden of justice. “Our task,” says Lévinas, “is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead it to the said, to the putting together of structures which make possible justice and the ‘I think’” (*OTB* 46). It is not that the saying itself ever makes into language; as noted above, the saying is irreducible to constative descriptions and propositions. Instead, an encounter with the saying makes language, thinking, and justice possible. Note here Lévinas’s layering of justice and the I thinking together. The true, the good, the just are not over there with the saying trying to make their way over here to the said. Lévinas, justice and thinking are terms which overlap because they are both founded in a sociality with alterity. They are here with us, enabled in our obligation and freedom.

As a specific concern, justice is central to my interest in reading Lévinasian ethics for rhetorical studies and therefore I will take it up in detail in Chapter Four. The point I’m driving toward in this chapter is that rhetoric, in all the ways that we use the term and that Lévinas doesn’t, is the very stuff of an ethical being in the world. It binds us together, pulls us apart, and offers up just and thoughtful relations. Rhetoric is not a container or midwife for moral linguistic action or deliberation within the *polis*; our relations, our language, is already ethical. In Lévinasian terms, “I love you” and “Go to hell” have the same ethical weight. This is where Lévinasian ethics becomes so troublesome for rhetoricians. On the one hand, it seems to advance a deep amorality, a free pass, that simply names all encounters ethical no matter their content; on the other hand, Lévinas’s ethics can be paralyzing, seemingly unable to answer the question,

“What do I say?” The alternative to both options is to take on the impossible task of troubling out the Other’s engagement with rhetoric, to find one’s way through how we construct the Other in necessarily flawed and limited ways to the other side where we can see how “What do I say?” and “What do I do?” are first and foremost attempts to address infinity in totalizing terms.

Simon Critchley, writing in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, poses three difficult questions and I want to read these questions as ways of approaching the impossible task I just described. The questions are versions of one another, but each highlights a different component of approaching the Other that is instructive to our task. Early in his text, Critchley puts the matter bluntly when he writes, “How can the Said be unsaid?” (9). His point is deceptively simple: if the said is but a trace or a shadow of an encounter with the Other which cannot be held, captured, recreated, or fully imagined in discourse, how can the said point backwards to its origin in the saying? We cannot simply follow the Said back to its source in the Saying. There is only the said and the impossibility of its undoing which nevertheless carries with it the responsibility of the saying. This, I believe, is what Critchley means when he later asks, “What linguistic resources make available the impossibility of addressing the other?” (29). In answering this question, we get a different version of the same idea that focuses our attention on components of the said which can act as resources, linguistic materials which can be put to use. These resources, Critchley offers, cannot do the impossible and address the other; but they can make that impossibility available, evident, and unavoidable. Once our attention is trained on the subject’s unavoidable and impossible freedom and obligation, Critchley asks, “How does the ethical relation to the Other enter into the textual economy of

betrayal?” (48). Here, Critchley’s question has shifted forward to the fact that this textual economy, this discursive plane on which we will attempt the unsaid, is an exchange system which betrays.

In this case, betrayal as a concept indexes third key concepts that illuminate how discourse interacts in between the saying and the said. First, we think of the said as betrayal of the saying because the said is ontologically never the saying, and yet the said is simultaneously the only way of thinking the saying. Second, the notion of betrayal describes something about how the subject “I” operates. “I” speak as if for myself each time “I” speak, yet to do so is fundamentally dependent on the other and the experience of the saying. Furthermore, speaking “I” erases the trace of the saying from my said. Third, betrayal marks the beginning of justice as the only way to act judiciously begins with the “I” thinking, coming to a decision, a judgment about what ought to be done. Derrida calls this the “initial perjury,” wherein the only way to give faithful testimony is to begin with a lie: that “I” can speak for myself. This is what Critchley is getting at when he describes the said’s discursive marketplace as space which double-crosses the saying and, thankfully, this betrayal cuts both ways. The said’s treachery evidences the betrayal itself. So Critchley’s questions pose a theory of sorts, a framework for considering rhetoric and ethics by paying close attention to treasonous discourses, discourses which intentionally expose exposedness, which offer up the impossibility of the said addressing the Other. They are treasonous, however, because they’re attempts to expose exposedness will always fall short, failing in their aim each time they collapse the saying into the said.

C. Two Dialogues

To answer Critchley's questions, I want to engage in conversation with two separate dialogues that in their own ways take on the relation between discourse and the Other. Together, they evidence the tropes, the linguistic resources, which make available the impossibility of approaching the Other, the reluctance yet necessity of that approach, and the imperative call to justice that springs from its impossibility. If you will, I aim to take up Critchley's call to deconstruction and read these dialogues the Other way to locate within them "a moment of alterity," "a point of otherness within . . . and then to deconstruct this conceptuality from that position of alterity" (Critchley 29, 26). The goal will be to exhaust the texts, to find the end points where they are merely indices of impossibility and, from this point of closure, to observe how the impossibility chases us out of paralysis and opens towards justice. As a counter-reading to Chapter Two's observed insistence on grounding ethicality in the *polis*, I will read the Other within the Students' Right to Their Own Language debate inside Stephen Judy's 1978 fictionalized panel discussion between a linguist, a high school English teacher, a parent, and a journalist. The second dialogue takes place between scholars in composition studies, rhetoric, and communication who engage with Lévinasian ethics. Therein, I will locate the "linguistic resources," to use Critchley's language, which "make available the impossibility of addressing the other" in contemporary rhetorical scholarship: in communication studies, Amit Pinchevski examines how we frame the limits of communication by considering incomprehensibility in the biblical account of the Tower of Babel and response-ability in the discourse of autism; in composition studies, Janis Haswell, Richard Haswell, and Glenn Blalock's work considers the *topoi* of hospitality while Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes trouble identity as a site

for engaging the Other. In rhetorical studies, Johanna Hartelius's work takes up the immigrant-alien as a publicly imagined response to encountering an Other.

Tracing the *topoi* of incommensurability, response-ability, hospitality, identity, and the alien through SRTOL and contemporary rhetorical scholarship, we first observe the exposing of exposedness, but the two dialogues also indicate the difficulties of reconciling the impossibility of approaching the Other with the obligation to do so. By troubling communication studies' preoccupation with successful communication, Pinchevski's discussion of incomprehensibility and response-ability manages to expose exposedness—it indexes our exposure to the Other—without pinning down alterity; the work in composition studies and rhetorical studies is less successful, for in each the *topoi* are mismanaged. Instead of honoring the impossibility of the obligation, hospitality, identity, and the alien become containers for alterity, means for its circumferencing. Part of my task in this chapter, then, is to take insights gained from Pinchevski and reread hospitality, identity, and the alien as moments to expose exposedness and bear witness to the said's treason.

D. The Incomprehensible: Troubling Successful Communication in Communication Studies

In 1978, Stephen Judy gives over his Editor's Page in *English Journal* to dramatize the then ongoing public debate over the SRTOL resolution.⁸ In "The Students' Right to their Own Language: A Dialogue," he stages a mock panel

⁸ "The Students Right to their Own Language: A Dialogue" is originally included in Stephen Judy's *The English Teacher's Handbook: Ideas and Resources for Teaching English*, 1979. The version in *English Journal* is adapted from Judy's monograph prior to its publication.

discussion between a linguist, a high school English teacher, a parent, and a journalist in order to summarize the SRTOL argument and the range of reactions to it. The discussion itself is relatively mundane; it more or less rehearses the expected arguments for and against the resolution with a straight-forward goal of explicating the issue. Nevertheless, readable within the dialogue are the tropes which will appear thirty years later in composition, rhetoric, and communication scholarship when attempting to wrangle those fields into conversation with Lévinas and the Other. SRTOL, I contend, is a pedagogical and political precursor to the philosophical engagement with the Other to follow in composition, rhetoric, and communication. Judy's dialogue begins by staging the *topos* of the incomprehensible in the scene setting and stage directions:

The Scene: A convention hotel somewhere in America. The room is large, decorated in hotel rococo with plush, deep red carpeting--threadbare in spots -- and red wallpaper flocked with gold. A huge chandelier with plastic baubles casts a pale orange glow over the crowd of a hundred or so persons who have gathered to hear a panel discussion.

The Participants: Moderator, Linguist, High School English Teacher, Parent, Journalist.

The Topic: "Do Students Have A Right to Their Own Language?"

(The Moderator ceases fidgeting with a cigarette burn hole in the pea green tablecloth and pours water from a pitcher, embossed with the hotel logotype, into plastic tumblers, which are passed along the row of panelists. . .) (Judy 6)

Here, we can see how the moderator introduces the *topos* of the Other's incomprehensibility. Immediately following the silent welcome to the panelists in the form of plastic tumblers full of water, the moderator "rises and speaks into the microphone, but hears only a high pitched note of feedback. After adjusting the mike, the Moderator tries again" (6). In part evoking the imagined experience of life at an academic conference, Judy also makes an important contribution to how the encounter of the Other is conceived. Standing before "the crowd of a hundred or so persons," the moderator recognizes in the presence of Others (i.e., the panelists and the audience) the need to begin, to speak, to engage in the only response to the Other afforded by the Other (6). We hear echoes here of Critchley's description of the Saying as "my exposure -- corporeal, sensible -- to the Other, my inability to refuse the Other's approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the Other" (7). Judy stages our obligation to respond to the call of the Other both literally and metaphorically: the moderator faces "a hundred or so persons," each an embodied Other, and is unable to refuse them. The moderator must respond to this obligation. Importantly, the moderator's attempt fails. Those first words return as a "high pitched note of feedback." Whatever these words were--most likely benign, obligatory, and polite greetings--they are mercifully lost because what remains is the shadow of the Saying, the obligation to respond.⁹ Of course, that shadow would remain even if a mundane "Good afternoon. Thank you for coming." had floated out over the crowd, but by accentuating communication's failure Judy highlights our own ethical responsibility as an unending obligation to the Other that is the precondition for our own subjectivity.

⁹ A more Talmudic reading of the Saying and Said would refuse such clear divisions in favor of seeing them as always already connected and overlapping.

The “high pitched note of feedback” is a back-feeding, if you will. It evidences the causal sequence of the subject’s emergence whereby the Other’s approach reverse engineers the subject. Judy stages a key assertion of Lévinas’s ethics and their connection to rhetoric: I am not approached by the Other; the Other approaches and I emerge. It is not just that I respond to the Other, but that the I is called out as the response to the Other. And even if the moderator’s opening remarks had succeeded, they still would have been a type of failure, the kind of failure that marks all communication as translation. Speech, as we’ll see Pinchevski describe below, is a recognition that pure communication (the depositing of ideas from one mind to another) has failed and thus language is always an impure alternative, a translation service, the existence of which testifies to our communicative lacking. Despite communication’s limits, our responsibility to the Other remains and thus the moderator’s failed opening prompts another attempt: “After adjusting the mike, the Moderator tries again.” This cycle of failed attempts at communication persists, not simply at the level of Judy’s scripted conversation, but in every instance of dialogue. Again, Judy performs our phenomenological experience of language and response-ability in the panelists’ failure to communicate: “Parent: There! The Linguist . . . says there’s no such thing as standard English . . . Linguist: All I said was that there is no fixed standard English . . .” (7). There is no need for written or spoken dialogue if pure communication worked. Communication is a testament to and attempt to overcome our mutual incomprehensibility.

Which is Amit Pinchevski’s point in the chapter, “Traces of Babel” from his 2005 monograph, *By Way of Interruption*. A communication scholar, Pinchevski’s work undermines what he sees as that field’s focus on successful communication as the

marker of ethical communication in that successful communication, so the field's theories go, "upholds the possibility of overcoming strife, of promoting understanding and thereby creating greater harmony" (6). Pinchevski responds to his field's valorization of successful communication by pressing his case that it in fact misses the ethical mark:

My aim here has been, rather, to draw out the otherness that inheres in every linguistic exchange but emerges most viscerally in instances of misunderstanding, inconsistency, and incomprehension. These borderline incidents at the frontier of linguistic capabilities are precisely where ethical possibilities may lie. The ethical position involving language and the Other implies a nonalienating foreignness: a relation preceding and exceeding any common ground, site or lingo. (148)

To explore this way of rethinking the ethical position in a Lévinasian framework, Pinchevski considers and reinterprets the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel. In the narrative, Pinchevski posits that, prior to the tower's demise, there was no communication as we know it. Rather, pure language simply deposited ideas from one mind to another with no need to interpret or translate. He then reads the building of the tower as hubris, "the sin of excessive pride" which rests on the misuse of pure language: "the gift of pure language was put to a malevolent purpose" (124). The gift of God is mistaken for the bestowal of divine impunity. Pure language forgets the Saying altogether and walks away from its commitment to alterity for its very existence. The malevolence of pure language was, as Pinchevski puts it, that at Babel "their language was the ultimate incarnation of the Said: a complete reduction of language to the

circulation of information, a language addressed to everyone in general but to no one in particular” (125). Without the affront of individual alterity, Pinchevski argues, there is no ethical relation; without you, I am not me and without you giving me me I am not in your debt. Pure communication forgets people and transforms them into unresponsive communicative nodes. The destruction of the tower ends the pure communicative function, forces humans to communicate discursively, and thus precipitates the possibility of ethics. God does us a favor, really, because when “[r]adical misunderstanding was reinstated and became the order on earth, a linguistic disorder [i]ntroduced a unique ethical moment” (126). Pinchevski describes the ethical opportunity enabled by our linguistic affliction as follows:

[L]anguage could not be used anymore for the duplication of one mind into the other; it came to an impasse, abruptly exposing speakers to the otherness around them. The confusion caused the people of Babel to retract their gazes from the tower to one another’s faces, acknowledging, maybe for the first time, that they were different, finite, separate -- a dialogue of baffled faces. (126)

We see here how the Tower of Babel becomes a touchstone for Pinchevski who seeks to upend his field’s insistence on successful communication as ethical communication. Alongside Lévinas, he wants to look to interruptions and failures as sites of the ethical; with the Babel narrative he’s able to go a step further and reverse the ethical relation. Taken to its ends, successful communication is no communication at all. It is simply the transferring of ideas from one mind to another. In so doing, essentialized successful communication robs the world of ethics and supplants it with a pure exchange of ideas.

This network of exchanging ideas becomes mathematical in its practices: a ledger of information that can be sorted, ranked, and exported. Despite its efficiency, successful and pure communication has no need of ethics. It encounters no others. It has no gifts of obligation to give.

So we see in Pinchevski's work the troping of alterity as miscommunication and incomprehensibility. Crucially, Pinchevski's work recognizes that miscommunication and incomprehensibility is a gift; so while the Babylonians and the attendees of Stephen Judy's fictional dialogue share the frustrating experience of miscommunication--"ris[ing] and speak[ing] . . . but hear[ing] only a high pitched note of feedback" (Judy 6)--miscommunication inevitably positions them within an ethical encounter. Pure communication finds its limit in an Other. For Judy and the biblical narrative of Babel, incomprehension is a trope which manages alterity. In Judy's dialogue -- "After adjusting the mike, the Moderator tries again" (6) -- and in Pinchevski's Babel -- "condemned . . . to translation . . . they would have to transform meaning in one language to the other" (127) -- miscommunication leads to translation, a second attempt at communication in other words. Communication fails but the Other remains and forces the imperative to respond. Pinchevski suggests that all communication is this type of poetic translation, an engagement with alterity that seeks to move an idea from the foreign to the domestic without "domesticating the foreign" (132). The necessity of poetic translation forces ideas to submit to alterity and preserves the ethical orientation to language.

"Translation," Pinchevski writes, "does not attempt to replicate, transcribe or transubstantiate the original. . . it endeavors to reverberate the original's intention in the target language, and in order to produce that effect the translator has to search for a

spot within the target language that would resound the foreign one most distinctly” (134). Thus, Pinchevski’s work successfully manages the *topos* of incomprehensibility by deconstructing the *topos* and evidencing the constitutive role of failure therein. His analysis refuses an insistence on successful communication as a necessary ingredient for ethical rhetorical action and, instead, rereads successful communication as relying on an ever-present failure for its ethical relationality in the first place. Pinchevski exposes exposedness and honors it by declining to patch over failure with success, miscommunication with communication, or the Other with the Same. In a later chapter, Pinchevski takes this same impulse a step further; where in the Tower of Babel he deconstructs successful communication to unveil its constitutive need of failure, in the case study of autism and Melville’s *Bartleby’s Scrivener*, he deconstructs the perceived ethical requirement to respond to communication at all.

E. Response-ability: Autism, the Other, and the Imperative to Respond

At various points in Stephen Judy’s dialogue, the participants express frustration with the SRTOL resolution and its seeming passivity in its affirmation of students’ rights and the need for appropriate teacher training (6). As we will see below, Pinchevski will call this the imperative to respond, or response-ability. The Teacher and the Linguist most clearly articulate this concern, stating, respectively, “One great weakness in the CCCC statement is that it talks about respecting and not interfering, but it doesn’t say anything about what the schools should do in a positive vein” and “The writers should have made some positive statements too, so that they did not seem to be implying a *laissez faire* approach” (7). The Teacher and Linguist, it seems, want lesson plans that

address managing multiple dialects, a better rubric for assessing students' non-EAE writing. The concern here is that the writers of the resolution have not genuinely acted but instead engaged without engaging. They affirm, they respect, they do not interfere, but this, the Teacher claims, is not sufficient. The full circle of communication from intent to consequence is incomplete, so they argue. Herein, we can see another means to manage the Other by forcing observable action as a means for inclusion. They pathologize non-action, pushing non-actors out to the unincorporated boundary of the community, the boundary between communicative action and inaction. Successful communication forms the center and incommunicability is its limit. Within this paradigm, Pinchevski troubles the perception of the obligation to respond. We will explore the limits of communication in Judy's dialogue further, but first we will explore how Pinchevski, in a later chapter from his monograph, *By Way of Interruption*, explores the troping of the other's response-ability, the necessity of response. The other, we will see, is s/he who declines the imperative to communicate; it is neither communication nor non-communication, but some middle ground that Pinchevski explores by considering autism and its perceived failure to communicate. What we will observe is that to decline a communicative opportunity is its own type of response.

As I explore earlier in this chapter, Pinchevski's project in *By Way of Interruption* is to consider how an insistence on successful communication overwrites and ignores the importance of the failure of communication inherent in every communicative act. In the chapter, "Incommunicable Boundary," Pinchevski explores this idea further by studying the ways in which our insistence on successful communication pathologizes non-communication and thus pushes non-communicators to a conceptual boundary.

Incommunicability, he argues, is conceived as sitting “at the edge of existing possibilities” and those persons who occupy such spaces are others who are outside of the communicative community. His work aims to correct this view, suggesting instead that those who do not communicate are not beyond the communicative community, but are those who mark its constitutive boundary and enable communication in the first place. This granular distinction is key. Is a non-communicator beyond our ethical sociality or precisely at its edge, marking out its boundary, and enabling ethical relationality? This is the question Pinchevski considers via relevant medical discourse on autism and in Herman Melville’s short story, “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Pinchevski rereads non-communicating others as taking up a particular type of response-ability, one that renders communication possible in the first place.

Pinchevski’s contention is that our concern with successful communication is supported by three concepts:

- (1) the relationship between mental and social well-being and communication; (2) the dangerous or even disastrous effects associated thereby with communication failure; (3) the relegation of incommunicability to the perimeters of ordinary processes. (152)

As a counter, Pinchevski offers that “the risk of failure is a necessary and positive condition of communication” (153); I submit that what Pinchevski is identifying is the antinomic connection between communicability and incommunicability, for to even think successful communication one must have the failure thereof as a constitutive possibility. As an exemplar, he points to autism and its antinomic pairing with the psychological concept, Theory of Mind (ToM), which posits that successful communication rests on

one person's ability to predict and interpret what is going on in the mind of another. As Pinchevski puts it, Theory of Mind contends that "effective social relations require that one fills in the blanks when dealing with others, that is, be able to 'mind read' others' actions and intentions" (159). Autism, classically defined, is a disability that puts the minds of others outside the comprehension of the autistic person, something psychologists call "mindblindness" (155). But as Pinchevski notes, mindblindness and mind reading are fundamentally embedded within one another; you cannot have Theory of Mind reading without the possibility of mindblindness, or vice versa. It is not that psychologists imagined the theory of mind reading and then encountered its limit in mindblindness; the encounter of autistic mindblindness forces the Theory of Mind to appear in order to retroactively justify the pathologization of mindblindness in the first place. Pinchevski writes, "Without autism, Theory of Mind would simply make no sense, and without the idea of 'mindblindness,' mind reading would be equally meaningless" (163). Autism is more than a case study that explains Theory of Mind, Pinchevski argues, but is its "very foundation . . . the theory's functional integrity," its "archetypal inverse" (163).¹⁰ Pinchevski's point is that Theory of Mind normalizes successful communication as a necessary condition for community and, subsequently, renders beyond the conceptual limits those who are unable to achieve successful communication -- those past the far edges of communicability are those who refuse (or are unable to actualize) their response-ability and are therefore fundamentally other. Under this paradigm, autism "is not merely a disorder," he writes, "but also a

¹⁰ It is important to note that Pinchevski is working with a historical view of autism, one which imagined autistic people as virtually untreatable. It's this view of autistic identity as one utterly removed from the communicative domain of society that leads to their institutionalization. Pinchevski's point is that ToM arises in this historical moment which imagines autistics as fundamentally other.

paradigmatic case of arrest in communication, socialization and development . . . the ultimate impasse . . .” (164). But this point of view, Pinchevski goes on to argue, misconstrues the conceptual relationship between incommunicability and communicability as it relates to response-ability. It is not that incommunicability exists outside the boundary of communicability in some space of absolute incomprehension; rather, incommunicability is the boundary that circles communication and renders it conceivable in the first place. Incommunicability is not a refusal of response-ability, but is coterminous with it.

To explore how autism functions as this paradigmatic limit to communication that delineates its very possibility, Pinchevski re-reads Herman Melville’s 1853 story, *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street*, wherein the title character is read as autistic.¹¹ In the narrative, Bartleby goes to work for an elderly lawyer who is both charmed and frustrated by Bartleby’s eccentricities. Particularly irritating to the lawyer is Bartleby’s frequent response to requests and demands: a simple, polite, yet determined “I prefer not to” (172-73). Pinchevski quotes Melville at length to prove the point:

“Will you tell me, Bartleby, where were you born?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Will you tell me *anything* about yourself?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you . . . “

“What is your answer, Bartleby?” . . .

¹¹ Pinchevski is not the first to consider Bartleby as autistic. See Sullivan’s 1976 piece, “Bartleby and Infantile Autism.”

“At present I prefer to give no answer,” he said . . . (Melville 37, qtd. in Pinchevski 172-73)

For Pinchevski, Bartleby exists precisely at the boundary of incommunicability, but not yet beyond it. It is not that Bartleby does not communicate, but rather that he declines the opportunity to do so while still engaging the social relationship. Bartleby troubles easy notions of response-ability, for as Pinchevski writes, “‘I would prefer not to’ expresses neither defiance nor compliance but a ‘negative preference’” (175).

Pinchevski goes on to argue that Bartleby’s negative preference disrupts the orderliness of communication by refusing the “commonsense” way in which language comes to “designate things and activities” (175). Moreover, and perhaps more interestingly, Pinchevski identifies how Bartleby’s “formula, which refuses to refuse,” finds a means to do something other than engage or disengage (179). He remains “facing in proximity,” Pinchevski writes, “still evoking response-ability” (179). So even though Bartleby maintains his position on the boundary of incommunicability he never slips over into obscurity. It is not that Bartleby says nothing; instead, he refuses communication which is its own type of response. This disruption of language operates as the constitutive limit for communication itself; Bartleby’s negative preference is the enacted impossibility inherent in every attempt at communication.

As a case study, Bartleby allows Pinchevski to explore the idea that non-communication is not a negation of communication, but rather the internal and always close “possibility of failure” of communication itself. What we hear in the Bartleby case is an attempt to manage responders at the edge of communicable action, those who engage by refusing to engage. Assertive non-responses, Bartleby’s “I prefer not to,” for

example, highlight the boundary of communicability and evidence successful communication's constitutive need of communicative failure. Those who insist on communicative success attempt to force non-communicators into communicating and exhibit their own pathology in the process. As Pinchevski notes, "both Bartleby and the lawyer have had their fair share . . . of bizarre behavior" (178). The point I want to highlight next is the similarity of the lawyer's response to Bartleby and the responses of some participants in Judy's dialogue. The *topos* associated with the other here is not so much one of the other, but a *topos* of a response to the other, an insistence on communication in the face of assertive disengagement.

The lawyer's responses to Bartleby in some respects mirror the fictional panelists' responses to the SRTOL resolution and its affirmation of students' rights. Let me be clear; I'm not suggesting that the SRTOL resolution parallels autistic behavior nor that it is refusing to communicate. Rather, the parallel exists with the responders to it who view SRTOL as an embodiment of otherness which is communicating without acting. As noted earlier, at different points in Judy's dialogue, participants voice their concern that SRTOL is intervening without acting. The Teacher contends that it "respect[s]" and doesn't "interfer[e]" and should do something in a "positive vein"; similarly, the Linguist accuses the writers of SRTOL of "implying a *laissez faire* approach" (7). Later, the Parent intervenes, furious that students might not be taught Standard American English grammar:

Parent: We keep talking minorities. Actually my kids use pretty good English, because I've always insisted on it around home. But I want somebody to correct and grade their work so they'll get ready for college,

not some namby-pamby who'll say "That's lovely" to everything they write.

. .

Moderator: Let me point out here that we're blurring that distinction between editing and standard English again.

Parent: So what! The point is somebody's got to teach *something*. (8, emphasis in original)

It seems here that the Teacher, Linguist, and particularly the Parent are encountering an otherness which acts and communicates in unexpected ways. The SRTOL presents speakers of non-standard dialects as others who speak, who engage, but perhaps do not play by the same set of rules, confusing typical understandings of response-ability. The Teacher insists that teachers are doing something, while the Parent responds that that something is not an acceptable response. The three participants then perceive SRTOL as acknowledging this other way of engaging and are frustrated with its communicative disengagement. These others are present, they are speaking, and the Teacher, Linguist, and the Parent insist that someone do something: "somebody's got to teach *something*," the Parent insists. These speakers of non-standard dialects are engaging from the margin of a communicative paradigm which, in the words of the Journalist participating in the dialogue, takes as its warrant that "it would seem more useful for the students to speak standard than to go on speaking nonstandard" (7). The SRTOL resolution responds to this insistence in a fashion similar to Bartleby: "I prefer not to." The SRTOL does not speak to what these Other speakers ought to do, but what the academe ought and ought not to do. The SRTOL reframes response-ability here as the right to respond as one wishes. The perception of an engaged non-engagement (I

think there's a fair amount of debate about whether SRTOL actually does this or not -- again, it is the perception of non-engagement that I am considering here) on behalf of the SRTOL resolution evidences the ever-present possibility of communication's failure; in the eyes of the protesting participants, SRTOL is teetering on the boundary of incommunicability, wavering in its response-ability. But as Diane Davis puts it, "communication as exposition and compearance has nothing to do with the transfer of messages or the desire for consensus or recognition" (loc. 115). This is Lévinas's point which Pinchevski takes up: incomprehensibility is an always present, constitutive player in communication. As such, the choice not to respond is itself an always necessary means of engaging response-ability. "I prefer not to," is not antithetical to our ethical condition, but rather "[s]hor[es] up the possibility of failure. . . For it is precisely the possibility of failure that permits drawing near the Other and that allows the Other to make a comeback" as Pinchevski puts it (184). SRTOL indexes the common insistence for successful communication while also framing out alternative ways of taking up response-ability. It is the always-present possibility of closure that opens communication.

What we observe in Pinchevski's uptake of Lévinas and in the SRTOL is the demonstration of our exposedness. Pinchevski manages to introduce *topoi* of the other - - incomprehension and response-ability -- that do the difficult work of answering Critchley's earlier question, "How does the ethical relation to the Other enter into the textual economy of betrayal?" Put another way, incomprehension and response-ability are *topoi* that evidence the Other in the textual economy of betrayal. These *topoi* index the always-necessary presence of the Other at the same time that that indexing marks

the alterity of the Other. The incomprehensible, for example, remains incomprehensible but its deployment as a *topos* presences its absence. Pinchevski's work takes up Lévinas's ethical framework in a rhetorical paradigm and, by problematizing successful communication, manages to lay plain a means by which discourse relies on the ethical relation with the Other at the same time that it double crosses the Other. As I will examine next, scholars in composition studies have been less successful in their attempts at this same task.

F. Hospitality: Composition Studies and the Confrontation of the Impossible

Prior to the moderator's encounter with the incomprehensible, Judy's dialogue stages hospitality in the scene setting and stage direction as a means of encounter with an Other. As will be discussed below, hospitality re-emerges later in composition studies as a *topos* which foregrounds the Other's approach. As we will see, the possibilities inherent in hospitality for exposing exposedness are not fully explored; in particular, we will notice that Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock do not fully contend with the impossibility of troping the Other in hospitality and, like Pinchevski's field of communication, the authors' insistence on successful communication limits the conceptualization of Lévinas's ethics to composition studies. We have already observed how Judy's opening scene begins, but I will repeat it here for clarity:

The Scene: A convention hotel somewhere in America. The room is large, decorated in hotel rococo with plush, deep red carpeting--threadbare in spots -- and red wallpaper flocked with gold. A huge chandelier with plastic

baubles casts a pale orange glow over the crowd of a hundred or so persons who have gathered to hear a panel discussion.

The Participants: Moderator, Linguist, High School English Teacher, Parent, Journalist.

The Topic: "Do Students Have A Right to Their Own Language?"

(The Moderator ceases fidgeting with a cigarette burn hole in the pea green tablecloth and pours water from a pitcher, embossed with the hotel logotype, into plastic tumblers, which are passed along the row of panelists. . .) (Judy 6)

Writing to the readers of *English Journal*, Judy invites his scholarly audience into the familiar space of the convention hotel "somewhere in America." noting a tension between the refined and the worn which alludes to the English language variants up for debate: the "plush, deep red carpeting," the "huge chandelier," and "red wallpaper flocked with gold" evoke a grandeur which is now brought low by the carpet, "threadbare in spots", and the chandelier's unfortunate "plastic baubles" which throw "a pale orange glow." This glow hangs over the crowd, a jaundice that marks the excessive unease over the polarizing topic at hand. Yet into this disquiet Judy's moderator, who recognizes the awkwardness in the room, must break from it and "ceas[e] fidgeting with a cigarette hole in the pea green tablecloth" in order to "pour water from a black plastic pitcher." Before words are attempted "the plastic tumblers" of water "are passed along the row of panelists," a first act of hospitality for road weary travelers. Here we see our first echo of an encounter with an Other in the Moderator's two-part action: the moderator ceases and pours, stops and empties, interrupts and voids. Coming into

responsibility for the others at the table, the moderator ends the interior fidgeting and then empties all that has been made available to welcome and begin. It is this form of hospitality, from one traveler to another within a temporary abode, which Janis Haswell, Richard Haswell, and Glenn Blalock consider thirty years later when linking hospitality to Lévinas's ethics and the composition class.

In "Hospitality in College Composition Courses," Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock consider how the *topos* of hospitality can reframe the college writing classroom. It is their belief that our collective version of academic hospitality is a "failed hospitality" because it is inevitably motivated by "colonial, missionary, or trade" zeal (710). As a corrective, they consider three types of hospitality--Homeric, Judeo-Christian, and nomadic--as "a social or cultural praxis" (708). Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock decline to theorize more fully these types of hospitality. Rather, they "leave that route to others" pointing in an aside that "Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Emmanuel Lévinas are good places to start" (708). So the theoretical and philosophical connections are unfortunately and intentionally left to the side. The engagement with the Other under the *topos* of hospitality, however, persists. First, Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock dispense with Homeric hospitality because its gift-giving structure is but a "ceremony helping bind temporary allies against a common enemy" (712-13). The authors then trouble Judeo-Christian hospitality; on the one hand, its "spiritual and radical equality" where "no soul is less than any other in the eyes of the Lord" is enviable, but on the other it maintains an us and them divide where we are the dwellers who host and you are the traveler who is hosted (712-13). They finally come to rest on the central Asian, eastern European, and Middle Eastern version of nomadic hospitality

which they claim is “even more egalitarian” than Judeo-Christian hospitality because “a nomadic host offers tent and food to persons who are wandering, for whatever reason, away from their own lodgings. Although typically the host is also on the move, a guest is treated with extreme deference” (713). They then privilege this nomadic hospitality and ask “what would a writing course look like if it *embodied* the principles of hospitality?” (716, emphasis in original). They conclude that, as a classroom practice, nomadic hospitality “would encourage teachers to accept and treat students as arrivants, therefore as unknowns, therefore as equals in dignity, privilege, and value, therefore as ethically free of any objective or mission of the course for the length of the course” (716). The authors conclude by considering the pedagogical and technical implications of adopting nomadic hospitality as a classroom practice.

There is certainly something in the *topos* of hospitality that resonates as a means of encountering the Other in the textual economy of betrayal. When Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock describe the teacher as a “co-sharer with unknown *arrivants* of an ad-hoc community in which the teacher, as host, offers ease--ease with unique lives and beliefs of strangers” (716), I hear echoes of Lévinas considerations on incomprehensibility and response-ability. It is that sense of an “ad-hoc community” wherein the “unique lives and beliefs of strangers” are not ironed out in similitude. Hospitality, as the authors here point out, implies an easiness with ambiguity that coincides with abiding response-ability, which I would suggest is precisely the moderator’s role in Judy’s dialogue. Throughout the conversation, the moderator as host finds the middle road within the contentious debate (“We’ve got two issues cooking here”, “. . . we’re blurring that distinction. . . again”), protects others’ right to speak and diffuses tension (“Now . . . well

. . . uh, the Linguist has something to say.”), acknowledges the realities at hand (“This isn’t a topic on which we are likely to reach closure”), and calls all parties back to the table (“I’ll recommend to the program chair that we continue with this session next year”) (7-8). Despite the possibilities of the *topos*, the manner in which Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock limits the full consideration of hospitality as a *topos* for exposing exposedness because of some key oversights.

At issue in “Hospitality in College Composition Courses” is the relationship the authors describe between host and *arrivant*. Within their preferred nomadic mode of hospitality (Bedouin in particular), the authors imagine the relationship between host and guest as vulnerable, daunting, and countercultural; what they do not do, however, is acknowledge the impossibility inherent in the Other’s approach, the fact that the Other cannot be fully at home in the stranger’s abode. They write,

In a world that often functions by separating guest and host. . .there is some argument in recommending that teachers and students simply go contrary.

And maybe especially writing teachers, and especially in their classrooms. . . That gulf between literary arrivant, writer and reader, can be daunting. The keys to crossing it, as any good host knows, are common ground, openness, and ease. (723)

In their closing recommendations, Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock imagine the writing classroom as a “retreat” where the host and guest can “simply go contrary,” where through “common ground, openness, and ease” the host can cross the “gulf” that divides and welcome the Other (723). My point here is that the authors imagine that,

while difficult, the Other can be made to feel at home. To borrow Pinchevski's critique of communication studies, what the authors do not foreground here is that a successful hosting within the writing classroom is an impossible one in a Lévinasian ethical framework. Pinchevski's discussion of the necessity of failure applies here and reminds us that the very notion of the host and guest rests on the incommensurability of the two terms. The guest can never be at home with the host for the moment a guest feels at home, they cease to be a guest. Thus, Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock are getting it wrong when they point to Virginia Woolf's recommendation as an indicator of successful hospitality that "[t]he good host-writer . . . puts before the reader 'something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy'" (723); one might feel welcome with strangers, but being welcome and being at home are different entirely.

Perhaps more important than the observation that hospitality requires foreignness is the observation that the authors perceive welcoming as a disposition available to the host prior to the arrival of the guest. Even nomadic hosting, the welcoming of travelers by travelers, seems to require the establishment of the host's temporary dwelling prior to the arrival of the guest in the Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock's system. To welcome a guest, the traveler must have already set up camp; they write, "A nomadic host offers tent and food to persons who are wandering. . . ." as if the nomad sets up camp and then hangs a vacancy sign before ever spotting another traveler on the horizon (713). The camp is an active sphere of activity prior to and after the approaching wanderer; but what the authors miss here is that the approach of the Other enables the encamped traveler to imagine the encampment as home in the first place.

Until those Other road-weary travelers appear in the distance, everyone is just camping. It is the impending presence of those Others that transforms camp into home and enables hospitality. The recognition of the Other granting subjectivity to host and the acknowledgement of the impossibility of making the traveler at home trouble the latter third of Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock's text which focuses on what writing teachers ought to do in their disposition towards students. I cannot somehow pre-plan how I will grapple with my dependence on these Others as they arrive in the classroom and give me myself. Likewise, the necessity of failure is not so easily squared with the goals of teaching successful writing. The radicality of a Lévinasian ethico-rhetoric is that it puts us in the position of having to make impossible judgments. It is more than finding a way to manage the necessity of course objectives, to borrow an example from the authors, "in ways that will not thwart or damage the student's (and the teacher's) growth in writing and learning" (716). Rather, our ethical condition forces us into the position of making such judgments in ways that honor the Other knowing that we have already betrayed them. It is not simply about embracing a sentimental ethics that reconfigures course objectives, assignments, and pedagogy to be more hospitable, a worthy endeavor to be sure, but recognizing that even the most welcoming classroom is already and necessarily predicated on a betrayal of the Other.

As a *topos*, hospitality is another linguistic resource that exposes our exposedness. Alongside incommensurability and response-ability, hospitality gives us an uneasy language to trace the Saying in the Said. Nevertheless, hospitality's deployment in Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock's work is limited by a focus on successful communication -- and this is the same trouble we observe in the remaining *topoi* of

identity and the alien. In all three cases, the insight of Pinchevski to focus on impossibility and the generative experience of the Other granting subjectivity are necessary to more clearly see how the Other is troped.

G. We Are Not The Same: Composition Studies, Identity, and the Impossible Other

As we observed in the adoption of hospitality in the previous section, we encounter a limitation in another *topos* of otherness, identity, when taken up by contemporary composition studies. The insistence on successful communication gets in the way of Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes' "Flattening Effects: Composition's Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence," as the authors apply a Lévinasian ethical framework to identity politics in the classroom. Taking on composition studies' social turn, the "experimentation with a variety of cultural studies pedagogies, critical pedagogies, and feminist-inflected composition pedagogies," arguing that it results in "identity hav[ing] become nearly fetishized in the writing classroom" (432). They go on to argue that student-to-student engagements which center on negotiating identities have settled into a practice of "flattening" mutual incommensurability by focusing on identity-based experiences of "shared humanity" (431). Differences, they contend, become a means for comprehensibility in the shared experience of being a unique and different self. In this way, the authors successfully foreground incommensurability as Pinchevski does, but Alexander and Rhodes cannot find their way to the necessity of failure and the functional impossibility of writing

Otherness. As Pinchevksi notes of communication studies, as compositionists the authors cannot theorize beyond successful communication.

The view of identity that Alexander and Rhodes take up has a relatively long history in composition studies reaching at least as far back as the SRTOL debates of the 1970s. In Stephen Judy's dialogue, identity is deployed in much the same way that Alexander and Rhodes will critique thirty years later. Early in the dialogue, for example, the linguist summarizes the SRTOL resolution as follows:

In simplest terms, "The Students' Right to Their Own Language" says that we need to recognize dialect diversity, that people of different national, ethnic, regional, and social origins speak differently. This statement acknowledges that there is no fixed, immutable standard English, but many different standards that are appropriate for different groups of people. (6)

One can hear the flattening Alexander and Rhodes describe in the response of the parent to the linguist's description, when the parent writes, "Ok, I can see that. I can be a pluralist, too. I see why, for example, Black people have been insisting on having their own literature included in the schools. Black pride and all" (7). As Alexander and Rhodes would likely point out, the parent flattens the encounter with an other into a comprehensible experience by identifying the shared impulse towards pluralism. "I can be a pluralist, too" the parent says, tamping down otherness, redeploying the experience of Black students as an exercise of pluralism in which the parent can equally participate. Alexander and Rhodes are specifically concerned with what this "flattening effect" means for queer-identified students whose identity narratives are flattened into

comprehensibility by and for straight audiences. Yet, it doesn't have to be this way, they contend. The flattening effect that emerges from a focus on shared humanity can be adjusted, altered to consider both "our common humanity and a strong sense of our radical alterity" (431). Here is where their work treads similar ground to Pinchevski's work in that Alexander and Rhodes foreground incommensurability as the centerpiece of examining our ethical condition.

To foreground incommensurability, Alexander and Rhodes propose that compositionists move away from inclusion to consider excessive otherness:

Ultimately, we want to move beyond, perhaps even leave behind, the multicultural imperative to "include" queerness as another "difference" in the composition curriculum (as well as in the profession) and explore instead how queerness in its excessive modes -- the ways queerness can exceed normalizing categories of identity, even lesbian and gay identity -- poses a unique and significant challenge to literacy. It is precisely in queerness's impossibility to be composed, in its excess, that its most important contributions to literacy, critical engagement, and writing may lie. (432, emphasis in original)

They suggest that compositionists intentionally ask students to write in "the gray areas," about things "they *do not know*" (445, emphasis in original). To model what this might look like in the classroom, they propose a writing prompt wherein students "[c]hoose a term of identity you use to define others, such as Asian American, white, girl, boy, queer, jock, and so forth." Students then put themselves in "someone else's shoes. What is unfamiliar? What do you not know?" The prompt ends with the following

directives: “*Do not make a claim. Do not argue. Do not conclude. Explore, meditate, engage in self-reflection*” (445, emphasis in original). Such practices, they argue, foreground the excessiveness of other’s human experiences and offer the writer a means of “car[ing] for another’s differences” without reducing them” (449).

In so doing, Alexander and Rhodes attempt to redeploy identity as a functional *topos* of Lévinas’s the other. In negotiating narratives of identity formation as readers and writers in the composition classroom, students confront alterity, they contend. Unlike identity narratives which focus on shared humanity and deaden the call of the incommensurable other, Alexander and Rhodes want to rescue the face of the Other made available in encounters with excessive identities, those beyond normative boundaries. Queer identity, in this case, is a Said which carries with it the burden of the Saying. Alexander and Rhodes’ point, I think, in reorienting from commonality to incommensurability is an attempt to resist forgetting the Saying within the Said. Importantly, they get that this call to incommensurability is an impossible task. As the authors note, queerness maintains within it an “impossibility to be composed”. What they overlook, however, is that by turning their attention to the excesses of otherness they end up suggesting that writers can avoid betraying the Others they encounter. As do Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock, Alexander and Rhodes seem to hold that there is a way of successfully communicating otherness that can avoid betraying it.

The real possibility of avoiding the betrayal of others is what Alexander and Rhodes propose as they critique stock composition writing prompts. For example, they suggest that prompts which ask student writers to, “Choose and critically analyze a term of identity you use to define yourself or that other people use to define you. . . .” or to,

“[t]ake inventory of your personal experiences of oppression along lines of race, gender, class, sex, ethnicity, age, education, physical norm, geographic region, or religion” flatten incommensurability into shared experiences (Hasseler and Bean qtd. in Alexander and Rhodes 436). They propose different types of prompts which would resist this type of flattening and thus avoid betraying the other’s otherness. They suggest following William P. Banks’ lead and asking “straight students [to] compose narratives in which they imagine being queer” (436). Prompts like this one, they contend, honor queerness’s excessive otherness and resist the flattening effect. What they miss, I submit, is that any encounter with an Other requires a certain amount of flattening to enter into the textual economy of betrayal. I am not suggesting that we do not revise such practices, but rather that our theorizing of them requires that we grapple fully with the always-present and necessary possibility of failure. They do not recognize how this prompt for the “straight student” as its own type of flattening, its own form of betrayal of an Other. The stable identity of the “straight student” is equally troublesome as the process of identification necessarily writes over Otherness. So while one prompt may be preferable, they both necessarily fail. But as compositionists, Alexander and Rhodes are seemingly bound to recommend that we do something different, something better, something that will lead our students to more successful communication without orienting those decisions to failure’s constitutive role therein.

Alexander and Rhodes’ expressed goal is to find some positive way forward, some recommendation for writing teachers to honor difference in their classroom practices. They lay out this goal in the conclusion as follows:

What narratives, and what writing assignments work to uncover these dimensions--the dimensions of profound difference that complicate and problematize rather than flatten narratives of a common humanity and that ignore the experiences of the body, the truths of the flesh? (451)

By emphasizing successful communication and pedagogical change, they miss an opportunity to focus in on the necessity of failure and our call to face into it. Their critique of identity which tropes otherness into shared humanity is accurate, but they then turn on it as a problem to be solved rather than exposed as a generative, constitutive component of rendering otherness in the world. It is not as if there is some other option, some other way that language could actually account for Otherness. Language always betrays. As we saw with hospitality, otherness participates in the compositionists' ongoing attempt to reimagine our ethical condition in a Lévinasian frame; but as with Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock, Alexander and Rhodes overlook the necessity of considering failure as foundational to exposing exposedness.

This same focus on successful communication persists as we shift to consider how the Other is taken up in rhetorical studies, albeit in a different fashion. In Johanna Hartelius's work on the alien other, her posthumanist rendering of language allows her to see the linguistic granting of subjectivity as a discursively successful process and therefore overlooks the embodied experience of actual alien Others.

H. The Invasion: The Alien, The Posthuman, and the Embodied Other

All characters in Stephen Judy's dialogue about SRTOL are speakers of Etandard American English; as a result, the speakers and voices of non-standard

English dialects are conspicuously absent from a text intended to consider the open inclusion of those absent voices in the classroom. When speakers of minority English dialects do make their single appearance in the dialogue, they are spoken for and about but never heard. Judy interrupts the dialogue with these alien voices we cannot hear when hotel employees mistakenly interrupt the panel:

(At this point, a side door swings open and two hotel employees barge into the room, speaking loudly in a minority dialect. When they realize they've gotten into the wrong place, they beat a quick retreat. All four panelists smile knowingly at one another, each assuming the episode has proven his or her point.) (8, emphasis in original)

The interplay here of a present absence illustrates another linguistic resource, the *topos* of the alien, taken up by compositionists to thematize the other, or what Johanna Hartelius calls the “inscription of subjectivity onto alterity” (313). Here, the alien other (the immigrant, the racial or ethnic other, the speaker of a minority English dialect, etc.) stands in for a pre-originary encounter with the unassimilable. The political or social alien is overwritten, then, as the unknowable, the always foreign, the forever undomesticated; thus, the observed lived lives of actual aliens become a resource for imagining Lévinas’s other through their inscription as alien subjects. In these terms, the alien becomes a prototypical, comprehensible performance of encountering alterity; the other becomes manageable in the *topos* of the alien subject. In her 2013 essay, “Facing Immigration: Prosopopeia and the ‘Muslim-Arab-Middle Eastern’ Other,” rhetorician Johanna Hartelius considers the inscription of subjectivity onto alterity through the rhetorical functions of voice (apostrophe) and face (*prosopopeia*). We will observe that

the author's thoughtful rhetorical analysis aligns with a Lévinasian ethics but misses the importance of the Other's retreat, its incommensurability, and the functional impossibility of giving voice and face to the Other. Taking up these insights from Pinchevksi, I will re-read Judy's dialogue as a corrective to Hartelius.

Hartelius considers what she calls posthumanist approaches to theorizing the other in Lévinas and Paul de Man and how these approaches open up a richer understanding of how the other/foreigner/immigrant is troped in American media coverage of Muslim-Arab-Middle Eastern Americans. Hartelius's work is interesting because she names two rhetorical mechanisms by which the other is troped as the alien in American media: apostrophe and *prosopopeia*. She notes that apostrophe is the rhetorical practice of a "rhetor call[ing] on, or hail[ing] an audience," a mechanism which "allows a rhetor to call on a particular person--present, absent, fictional" (313). Apostrophe, the author argues, is a means of giving voice to the absent other. For example, Hartelius points to Henry Highland Garnet's 1843 "Address to the Slaves" which addresses an absent audience and thus interpolates them into a new context with previously withheld agency (314). Working in tandem with apostrophe is *prosopopeia*, a tool which uses a "word or phrase" to present "an absent or fictional person . . . as though speaking and/or acting" (313). For example, Hartelius describes President Bill Clinton's engagement of *prosopopeia* when he spoke in the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. when addressing five thousand African American ministers in 1993, thus "subordinating himself to King's authority" and "generat[ing] the rhetorical authority" to speak (314). Whereas apostrophe gives voice to the absent other, Hartelius argues (against rhetorical precedent) that *prosopopeia* gives face to the absent other. Together,

apostrophe and *prosopopeia* demonstrate for Hartelius “the inscription of subjectivity on alterity”, particularly in “figurations of immigrants . . . the giving of face and voice” (313).

The granting of subjectivity to immigrants through apostrophe and *prosopopeia* is, in part, a theoretical exercise for Hartelius to demonstrate a posthumanist approach to language. In Lévinas and de Man’s work, Hartelius sees links between an encounter with alterity which gives a subject its subjectivity through the work of apostrophe and *prosopopeia*. In both, she argues, “language ‘uses’ subjects” rather than “language . . . [being] deployed intentionally by a priori (or structurally determined) subjects” (315). Her argument runs that apostrophe and *prosopopeia* are the linguistic means by which a comprehensible subjectivity is conferred onto an Other, in this case the Arab-Muslim-Middle Eastern immigrant to the United States. Hartelius is correct in naming two rhetorical means by which the *topos* of the alien engages the textual economy of betrayal, but I contend that what Hartelius misses is that the actuality of giving voice and face to the Other is never complete; the Other is never successfully faced and voiced but always, necessarily, escapes. Hartelius examines 170 articles from the *New York Times* published between 2001 and 2011 and considers how these media reports manage apostrophe and *prosopopeia* in order to grant subjectivity to Arab-Muslim-Middle Eastern immigrant others (316). In these 170 articles, Hartelius identifies three dominant tropes— “the face of an assimilated newcomer, the face of a patriot, and the face of a victim” (319)—and then chooses representative examples of each for closer analysis. Her description of the assimilation of Mr. Baker, a naturalized American of Palestinian origin, hinges on the successful transfer from alien to citizen, but what

Hartelius does not foreground is that in the processes of apostrophe and *prosopopeia* Mr. Baker's lived experience as a human Other, not just a subject, slips away.

Hartelius argues that the following text, reported in the *New York Times*, illustrates how the alterity of a neutralized Palestinian immigrant to the United States becomes manageable through *prosopopeia*, the presencing of an absent (and, here, domesticated) person in language. In this example, Mr. Baker's reported speech transmutes his commitment to Thanksgiving into demonstrable American patriotism: "Believe me, I don't look at it as an American holiday or a holiday that is not for Muslims," said Mr. Baker. "I live in America. You tell me to eat turkey, I'm going to eat turkey" (320). Here, Hartelius contends that it is the giving of voice which enables "The immigrant [to become] less foreign the more s/he assures the reader of his holiday-fervor. . ." (320). He becomes less strange, she argues, and more American. The giving of voice through the domesticated description of the alien subject, she contends, is one that "renders the chaotic and radically Other as something knowable and manageable" through a discourse that "refutes [alterity's] own foreignness" (320). Her point is that media representations of immigrants, like the one of Mr. Baker, make the unknown other knowable and manageable through the invocation of apostrophe and *prosopopeia*, the giving of face and voice. Again, her posthumanist point is that this is what language does; it imagines "figures which grant the referent" (319). But Hartelius's posthumanist reading of Mr. Baker's facing and voicing appears too clean, too simple. It is certainly the case that apostrophe and *prosopopeia* are "figures which grant the referent," as she notes; yet it seems that Hartelius's posthumanist interest in language prevents her from seeing that it is the confrontation with Mr. Baker as an embodied

Other that calls for apostrophe and *prosopopeia* in the first place. Language is not a machine that spits out subjects like widgets. As Diane Davis notes from Lévinas, language is the plane of our exposedness one to another. Davis puts Lévinas this way: “. . . before all else, in ‘communication’ what takes place is an exposition: finite existent exposed to finite existent, co-appearing before it and with it” (loc. 115). In fact, what Hartelius locates, but does not fully acknowledge, is what we do with language in the face of our exposedness: we call out subjects; we close in around the Saying and manage the Other in the Said; and, most importantly, we fail. Mr. Baker as a human Other escapes language’s grasp and leaves behind a subject.

Importantly, Stephen Judy’s dialogue foregrounds the Other’s escape and, as such, we can read the dialogue into Hartelius’s work as a corrective. It is no accident that the alien others of whom the participants speak in Stephen Judy’s dialogue are almost entirely absent from the text. There is one occasion when speakers of a minority dialect play a crucial role in the dialogue because it becomes the argumentative center for all speakers; it is where the unknowable others become known. In effect, this moment in the dialogue is the misplaced and unobserved conclusion to the entire dialogue because it is where, to borrow Hartelius’s language, the alien is given voice and face.

While the dialogue formally ends with the Moderator asserting that “we continue with this session next year” and the panelists informally continuing the debate as they prepare to leave (“‘You still can’t persuade me . . .’ ‘But don’t you see that . . .’ ‘Well, I appreciate that but. . .’ . . .”) the earlier incident evidences to each panelist the validity and correctness of their own position because the interruption inscribes upon these two

alien others subjectivities. They enter as aliens who “*swing*” open doors and “*barge*” in “*speaking loudly*,” but the language of Judy’s dialogue quickly grants them subjectivities amenable to their new context, subjectivities which help them “*realize they’ve gotten into the wrong place [and] beat a quick retreat*” (8, emphasis in original). This inscription of subjectivities onto alterity is confirmed in the reactions of the panelists who “*smile knowingly at one another, each assuming the episode has proven his or her point*” (8, emphasis in original). In effect, the interloping speakers of minority dialects settle the debate in their presence and speech; it ends here in the now knowable subjectivities of alien others who offer justification to each participant in precisely the way they need. The actualized faces and voices of Others grant manageable subjectivities and these subjectivities are then slotted into the participants’ individual frames of reference. The drawing out of Otherness and its deferral (again, this is the piece that Hartelius misses) is how the Other enters into the textual economy of betrayal. The granting of voice and face puts the Other in a position of flight; in the presence of its subjectification the Other is in “the wrong place” and “beats a quick retreat.” The resolution is both deferred and found here and it seems to be what the participants have been waiting for all along. Prior to the “employees barg[ing] into the room,” the Parent and the Journalist follow up the Linguist’s assertion that SRTOL should lay out proactive steps for teachers by asking what those steps might be and indicating their openness to hearing them:

Linguist: . . . The writer should have made some positive statements, too, so that they did not seem to be implying a *laissez faire* approach.

Journalist: Well, let’s hear them.

Parent: I’m all ears.

(At this point, a side door swings open and two hotel employees barge into the room, speaking loudly in a minority dialect. . . .) (7-8)

“Well, let’s hear them,” says the Journalist; “I’m all ears,” proclaims the Parent. While first a call for pedagogical approaches to address SRTOL, the doubleness of these statements rings out as a call to the alien to appear, to interrupt, to be granted a subject, and then retreat.

Now a known subject, there is no further need for the embodied Other at all. The text itself mimics the speakers of minority dialects own “quick retreat” and carries on. At the other end of the aside, the Teacher takes up the Parent’s and Linguist’s calls for more details without missing a beat:

. . . All four panelists smile knowingly at one another, each assuming the episode has proven his or her point.)

Teacher: First of all, I (and the CCCC statement writers) believe in helping students extend options. . . (8)

The dialogue continues as if the interruption had never taken place. This crucial piece of the dramatic dialogue could be lifted from the text with no need for verbal sutures, no edits necessary to patch over the gap. Curiously, the speakers of minority dialects are the only participants who enter and exit the scene. They are, quite intentionally, migrants into the conversation and form a caesura of sorts. As the very subject matter of the dialogue itself, the alien others are needed but only for as long as it takes to give them voice and face. Once they are inscribed with subjectivity, their embodied selves are no longer needed: as quickly as they arrive, “they realize they’ve gotten into the wrong place” and “beat a quick retreat” (8).

Like hospitality and identity, the *topos* of the alien offers up linguistic resources for observing our exposedness. All three, however, are in need of the further insights that Pinchevski offers when discussing incommensurability and response-ability. In particular, Pinchevski's insights foreground the limitations of insisting on successful communication as the starting point for an ethical rhetorical practice.

I. Conclusion

What this chapter gets at most fundamentally is the upheaval of how to render ethics in the face of Lévinas's insights about the approaching Other. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *polis* broadly defined operates perfectly as an ethical backbone for a field whose interest is in successful communication. As Pinchevski points out, however, successful communication belies the reality of our encounter with the Other. What the linguistic resources discussed in this chapter, those that expose our exposedness, offer up is the difficulty of imagining an ethical rhetorical practice built from a deep acknowledgement of our reliance on failure. Critchley's first question, "how can the Said be unsaid?" comes back to haunt us as the answer is simply that it cannot.¹² But that does nothing to negate our obligation to read the Other way and find means of taking on the impossible task of honoring the Saying as it is betrayed in the Said.

¹² Again, it is worth noting that those reading Lévinas from a more Jewish perspective will refuse Critchley and my opposing of the Saying and the Said in the first place.

IV. SOME WORDS ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS

“We will not choose between the opening and the totality. Therefore, we will be incoherent, but without systematically resigning ourselves to incoherence.”

(Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” 104)

A. The Argument

The previous chapters have focused on the viability of a Lévinasian ethics for rhetorical practice (Chapter Two) and traced the linguistic resources employed by rhetorical studies to contend with our infinite ethical obligation to an Other (Chapter Three). This fourth chapter isolates another problem: the unavoidable violence that accompanies discursive action. This violence is unavoidable on two fronts: first, that speaking is always a fractious response to my infinite responsibility to the Other, for the only possible response to the Other is a discursive one, yet that discourse demarcates a closure, a loss, a site of blocked access back to the approaching Other; and second, that my obligation to an Other must contend with the always present presence of an other Other, what Lévinas calls the Third, for to address my infinite obligation to an other Other I must break from my infinite obligation to the first Other. How then can I mitigate the violence of negotiating multiple infinite obligations in a discourse that is in and of itself a violence? How can Lévinasian phenomenology assist rhetorical theory in contending with the impossibility of avoiding the violence of its practices? How does an ethical response to violence turn on acknowledging violence as a constitutive component of an ability to respond? All the while, we must resist the slide into paralysis

that troping the impossible appears to enable; we must not “wobble . . . loathe to advocate for [one’s] own judgment,” as Diane Davis contends, but instead deal head on with the fact that “justice demands judgments” (“The Fifth Risk” 253). In this chapter, I intend to hold in one hand the earlier conclusion that ethics and rhetoric are consubstantial, while on the other hand I trouble out the complicity of violence that is caught up in their consubstantiality. This chapter leaves the details of the Students’ Right to Their Own Language movement temporarily. I will return to SRTOL in the next chapter after moving through contemporary rhetorical theory, Lévinas, and Derrida’s readings of Lévinas in this chapter to pursue justice as a rhetorical practice by honoring the collapse of ethics and rhetoric and, at the same time, moving through the complicity of language and violence to pursue justice.

B. A Bridge: Risky Business

There is a third dialogue which aligns with the two conversations interwoven in Chapter Three about the tropes of impossibility that open up the other to our discussion. From 2000 to 2007, a key conversation unfolds between Steven Mailloux, Diane Davis, and John Muckelbauer. It begins with “Making Comparisons: First Contact, Ethnocentrism, and Cross-Cultural Communication,” Mailloux’s contribution to the collection, *Post-Nationalist American Studies* in 2000. The exchange continues in the pages of *Philosophy and Rhetoric* from 2005 to 2007, first in Davis’s “Addressing Alterity: Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Nonappropriative Relation” which, as she notes, is “dedicated and addressed to Steven Mailloux, who generously encouraged me to elaborate the notion of a non-hermeneutic rhetoric” (191 n1). Muckelbauer continues

the conversation with “Rhetoric, Asignification, and the Other: A Response to Diane Davis,” and the exchange ends with Davis’s “The Fifth Risk: A Response to John Muckelbauer” in 2007. This dialogue is instructive because it traces the inherent risks in the type of rhetorical project I am attempting here, a project which charts alternate lines to account for the ethicality of rhetorical practices while holding the line on both its functional imperative and philosophical impossibility; more importantly, it focuses our attention on the necessity of violence any time we attend to the Other and the impossibility of doing anything else. This focus offers to us a purchase on the ethical the polis cannot: the more we face into the ethicality of our rhetorical practice, the clearer our intractable collusion with violence becomes.

Stephen Mailloux initiates the dialogue in “Making Comparisons” by resisting the argument that there’s any such thing as an absolutely incommensurable encounter between alien cultures. This argument was a particularly pertinent one in American Studies at the time, as it refuses the comparative trend that looked to examine cross-cultural differences between intra-, inter-, and trans-national people groups. Mailloux makes the claim that this move rests on the erroneous assumption that the groups up for comparison are, at some level, incommensurable to one another; moreover, these points of incommensurability sit at the center of the differences between the compared groups (say, African Americans and white Americans) and thus their untranslatability becomes an essentialized feature of their group, the marker of their inherent difference from one another. As a counter, Mailloux offers up a view of what he calls “hermeneutic ethnocentrism” whereby we make sense of the so-called incommensurable communication of others by interpreting them with our own mythic, political, and social

contexts (112). His point (one he makes by interpreting the first contact between alien cultures in an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “Samaritan Snare”) is that that which is perceived as incommensurable in the other is interpreted as incomprehensible within one’s own cultural context, and, thus interpreted, this incommensurability becomes a hermeneutic difference, a point of contact across which alien cultures can begin interpollation. Mailloux does not wish to disregard the difficulty of cross-cultural communication, but rather insists that his view “rejects general claims that cross-cultural communication can ever be endlessly futile in principle” (121).

In, “Addressing Alterity,” Diane Davis agrees with Mailloux’s argument that there is nothing incommensurable in a hermeneutic model, yet goes on to argue for a theorization of incommensurability at the center of rhetoric’s non-hermeneutical components.¹³ This component of rhetoric, she contends, is under-considered. Following Lévinas, her point is that there is a dimension of rhetoric “that has nothing to do with meaning-making,” a dimension that “deals . . . in the address itself, in the exposure to the other” (192). To illustrate the centrality of the incommensurable, Davis deconstructs Mailloux’s reading of first contact between the crew of the Enterprise and the Tamarians; importantly, her deconstruction of Mailloux is not a dismissal; rather, she reads the other way and layers her work on top of Mailloux’s. Both Mailloux’s and Davis’s close readings of the *Enterprise* episode are rich, careful, and nuanced;¹⁴ I will overview them both here to draw out the connections between this exchange and the conclusions of the previous chapter: the ethical-rhetorical forces a confrontation with the

¹³ “Addressing Alterity: Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Nonappropriative Relation” is later included as “Hermeneutics”, the third chapter of *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*.

¹⁴ See Mailloux 119-22 and Davis “Addressing Alterity” 194-97.

incommensurability of the Other that demands a response. The complicity of violence, we will see, emerges in the exchange that follows between Davis and Muckelbauer.

Mailloux's reading of "Samaritan Snare" begins by highlighting the perception of the Tamarian's incomprehensibility that predates the Enterprise's arrival. Previous attempts at formal relations with them have failed for, as indicated in the historical report retrieved by Commander Data, the Tamarians are "incomprehensible." Picard, Mailloux observes, remains hopeful: "Are they truly incomprehensible? In my experience communication is a matter of patience, imagination" (119). Once on the ground and confronted by the Tamarian captain and his, at first, incomprehensible speech-- "Rai and Jiri at Lungha. Rai of Lowani. Lowani under two moons. Jiri of Ubaya. Ubaya of crossed roads. At Lungha. Lungha, her grey sky" (120) --Picard predictably struggles to make any communicative headway. Eventually, however, Mailloux points out that Picard is able to "produce a rhetorical theory to make sense of the Tamarian's actions and sounds" which, confirmed later by Councilor Troi and Dr. Crusher, hinge on the point that "the Tamarian ego structure does not seem to allow what we normally think of as self-identity. . . They seem to communicate through narrative imagery, a reference to the individuals and places which appear in their mytho-historical accounts" (qtd. in Mailloux 120). This is what Mailloux means when he describes the hermeneutic impulse to translate incomprehensibility into culturally sensible incomprehension. It's a domestication of the absolutely foreign. Once Picard deciphers the structure of their communication, he is able to get back to the Enterprise and the ship carries on its way. For Mailloux, this exchange demonstrates Richard Rorty's point that no two groups can be utterly indecipherable to one another:

[T]here is no absolute incomprehensibility between alien cultures. . . No community can be so different from another that cross-cultural communication is in principle forever doomed to fail . . . for it is only against such a background of commonality that we can perceive radical difference. (120-21)

The *Enterprise* episode seems well-suited to make Mailloux's astute critique of American Studies; as mentioned earlier, Davis takes no issue with this hermeneutic conclusion, but re-reads the episode to draw our attention to the function of incomprehensibility and the obligation to respond that precedes and, potentially, confounds communication.

Davis begins her re-reading of Mailloux's account by observing that "what's missing from Mailloux's otherwise compelling account of this intergalactic first contact narrative is *the other*" (207, emphasis in original). Her focus is on the approach and the address of the other which she reads in two scenes from the "Samaritan's Snare" episode. The first occurs as night falls and Picard is stuck on the planet with Dathon, the Tamarian. Unable to comprehend his speech, Picard and Dathon come to a *détente* of sorts. Settling in for the night, Picard is unsure if it's safe for him to sleep or if he'll survive the cold night when, unexpectedly, Dathon throws him a burning stick with which to build his own fire. Davis reads this exchange as the approach of an other prior to communication. This "gift," Davis writes, "is the address itself, the saying or greeting, the generosity of an approach that communicates communicability as such"; the burning stick, Davis continues, "signifies . . . the exposedness of the one to the other. . . "(202). The second approach on which Davis focuses occurs later when an alien beast appears

and threatens to kill Picard. Dathon intervenes and saves Picard, but at the cost of his own life. For Davis, the approach of the beast that kills the other is a “necessity . . . in order to make sense of him, to turn him into a masterable concept” (203-04). What Davis maps here is the departure of the saying into the said. The first approach, the gift of the burning stick, is an emblem of exposedness, an index of the moment at which the Other opens itself to me, prior to communication, utterance, or sense. As Picard’s experiences demonstrate, there’s not much to be done in this space of exposure. Dathon opens himself to Picard; Picard is called up to respond, but, prior to communicative sense, they simply exist in each other’s presence. The second approach, the approach of death, however, moves Dathon into something discernable, identifiable, into a signifier with which Picard can make sense of him as “a man, a starship captain, a subject and citizen of his society, and so on. *Just like Picard*” (206, emphasis in original). As Davis puts it, Dathon’s death is a reduction of his otherness to the “overlap of sameness” (206), a sameness which Mailloux points out is the only way “one knows otherness” (199). Of course, for Davis the sameness which opens the other to interpretation is always already dependent on the non-hermeneutic approach of the other, the approach of the Other in the face of Dathon which obligates Picard prior to sensibility and interpretation. Picard is unable to make sense of Dathon, yet Picard encounters Dathon face to face and is bound to him.

It is important to hover for a moment over the intractability of violence in the episode between Dathon and Picard for it is the focus of this chapter and of the further conversation between Davis and Muckelbauer. Davis’s reading of the exchange between Picard and Dathon is instructive because it isolates the means by which the

saying and the said, those key Lévinasian terms, interface. The “overlap,” as Davis calls it, where the saying becomes manageable is fraught with violence. Of course, that manageability and communicability is never complete; the saying never actually appears in the said. Rather, the death of the Other dissolves the incomprehensibility of the approach into something comprehensible. I will quote Davis at length here as she teases out this interaction between the saying and the said on the field of death in the *Star Trek: Enterprise* episode:

[D]eath pulls Dathon *away* from himself, away from his knowable, culturally defined Self, drawing him into an absolute alterity that refuses to be effaced by any presumption of immanence. Picard’s hermeneutic machine kills off Dathon in order to get a fix on the ungraspable singularity that interrupts understanding’s power and possibility--but in the process, it lands Picard face to face with a *founding* im-possibility. This same im-possibility is explored in Shakespeare’s *MacBeth* and Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* as well as in the texts of the New Testament and on every analyst’s couch: the one I kill is never quite dead enough. S/he never stops calling me, addressing me, demanding a response. Death, as it turns out, does not shut Dathon (“Dathon”) up; it neither ends the conversation nor springs Picard from response-only mode. What withdraws in this death is precisely Dathon’s culturally assigned identity, precisely the overlap of sameness that invites the illusion of immanence. And when that goes, only an utterly incomprehensible and exceedingly lively opacity is left--an opacity that is figured here by Dathon’s corpse. (206)

In Davis's example, we have two types of violence. There is a violence visited upon bodies and the violent work of appropriating the Other and giving it a comprehensible subjectivity. Dathon's body dies, but that which demanded a response in the first place, is never quite dead enough. Picard's attempts to articulate his experiences with Dathon are marked by that violent hermeneutic impulse to give subjective meaning to something which precedes and exceeds the subject's ability to speak. The saying calls out in the said here, the brush with the infinite Other disappears into the trace of discourse and calls out for response from there. Notice the functionality of hermeneutic violence in this equation. Is there some other mode of operation? Is there some other way of speaking? Does Picard have choices? Muckelbauer does not ask these questions, but rather responds to Davis by outlining the four risks inherent in her project.

The four risks which shape Muckelbauer's response to Davis are, he claims, inherent in theorizing the non-hermeneutic, "assignifying dimension of language" (239). He goes on to argue that the risks, which I'll expand on below, are that 1) the absolutely other cannot be thematized or signified, 2) the encounter with the absolutely other becomes a subjective experience, 3) descriptions of the absolutely other return to the metaphor of excess, and that 4) the absolutely and irreducible other has "its own self-identical attributes," some observable, essential things around which it coheres (243-44). These risks, Muckelbauer concludes, indicate that "advocat[ing] openness to the irreducible other" cannot occur "without a necessary violent closure" (244). While not framed as a critique per se--Muckelbauer says that Davis's project is of "profound importance" and these risks are questions they put to us, not "objections that we might

direct at them” (241) --the four risks seem to take stock of areas of deep concern that accompany Davis’ work.

The first risk Muckelbauer outlines is a relatively straight-forward one: if the other is absolutely other then it cannot be thematized or signified. It’s a logical and conceptual flaw to imagine that there are linguistic structures that aptly correspond to an impossibility. If it is unknowable then, as Muckelbauer puts it, “it cannot even be known as ‘unknowable’” (242). The second risk follows the first, Muckelbauer contends. In the attempt to draw attention to the unknowability of the other, those who describe it do so in terms of one’s own subjective experience with it, or lack thereof. If the unknowable other is something that a subject can experience, then it has fallen trap to another kind of appropriation and reduction. Put differently, if I can experience the unknowable then it is a) something I can experience and know, and therefore not unknowable, and b) the utterly incomprehensible is scaled down to something framed by a single mind (242). For Muckelbauer, this math doesn’t work out; the utterly unknowable would seem, by definition, to be precisely that which is beyond the grasp of an individual mind. The third risk takes the first two a step further. Muckelbauer identifies that the language used to describe the unknowable accesses “the metaphors of excess” and this creates a problem as the “discourse of signification” uses the metaphors of excess to make sense of itself too. Thus, we end up with two discourses of excess: one that underpins the call to respond and another which explains the linguistic nature of the response itself. Thus, for Muckelbauer, the metaphors of excess do not actually get at the unknowable and incomprehensible, but rather form a tropological tradition of making the unknowable comprehensible by imagining it as excess (243). The fourth risk emerges from the first

three. Muckelbauer argues that these ways of attending to the Other assume that we can “attend to the other ‘on its own terms’,” as if it had “its own self-identical attributes . . . that might allow for some kind of proper response.” For us to respond to the other in this way it must have already been opened to the “signifying appropriation of the same,” otherwise there would be nothing to which we could respond (243-44).

Outlining these risks brings Muckelbauer to a two-part conclusion. First, to “advocate openness to the irreducible other” requires a “necessary violent closure” (244). If we are to approach the other as other, we must first have violently transformed it into something knowable. Second, the “encounter with the other is and must be impossible. While this encounter is both necessary and irreducible, it cannot simply *take place*” (244, emphasis in original). For Muckelbauer, the logics don’t work out. The other that can appear before us and to which we can respond is rendered there violently and, by the time it appears, can never be the other in its otherness anyway. For Muckelbauer, put simply, the impossible must always be impossible. Yet, he also concludes that these are “essential risks,” that to “attend to the irreducible, one must reduce;” for better or for worse, he concludes that “appropriation is appropriation” as “one appropriating discourse is no less appropriating than any other,” and he aptly names this process the “impure law of an impossible ethics” (245).

Davis’s response to Muckelbauer draws out the promise and problems that underpin his response to her. In “The Fifth Risk: A Response to John Muckelbauer’s Response,” Davis adds to Muckelbauer’s list, arguing that the fifth and final risk is believing that engaging the other is an elective and contemporaneous experience, as if the engagement of the other and its attendant risk were choices we are making here

and now. Rather, she contends, encountering the other as other “has already taken place in a ‘past’ that was never simply a now” (248). Unlike Muckelbauer’s risks, Davis’ fifth risk is a corrective to the idea that encountering the other this way or that is an act of my present volition. I do not come to the other; rather, it approaches and all these risks sweep in behind as it gives me the gift of my subjectivity. I have no choice in the matter.

At its center, Davis’s response to Muckelbauer turns not on the veracity of the attendant risks but on the impossibility for there to be any other option, some other way that we might encounter the other’s approach. Here again, I will quote Davis at length:

The priority of the other is not a matter of the subject’s choice but of its inescapable predicament . . . which is why Blanchot suggests that the relation with the other is impossibility itself. (248-49)

‘I’ marks a site of extreme surrender, a passivity beyond passivity that precedes and exceeds any active/passive choice. . . There are no action heroes in Lévinas, in other words; there are only radically exposed existents infinitely open to the other’s inspiration, alteration, assignation. (250)

My point is not to show that Picard could or should have responded differently but to show that, due to his irreparable exposedness, he can only respond, that the most appropriate and colonizing response is still a response, that response-only mode is the sole option for any subject.

(251)

That “there are no action heroes” seems to epitomize Davis’s response to Muckelbauer’s undergirding belief that one might find another way, some different approach to the other that skirts the troubling nature of the risks or the task itself. Davis is getting at something much more fundamental here: that “response-only” to the other is the very means of subjectivity. As I noted in Chapter One, and perhaps we see more fully here, the other gives us everything we have. We have only to respond. What surfaces, however, is just how deeply interwoven violence is to that response. Muckelbauer is not wrong when he concludes that “it is impossible to advocate openness to the irreducible other without a necessary violent closure” (244). Davis doesn’t wish this difficulty away; in fact she doubles down, confirming that this “inescapable predicament” is not an invitation to “wobble” in one’s commitment to justice (249, 253). Quoting Lévinas, Davis echoes our responsibilities given from within our inescapable complicity with violence: “Justice demands judgment” (253).

It is from here that we see how the exchange between Mailloux, Davis, Muckelbauer, and then Davis again positions violence at the very center of the ethical rhetorical and, now, also prompts a consideration of justice. As Davis notes, the “point is not to show that Picard [or I] could or should have responded differently” (251), but rather to expose exposedness as the ethical rhetorical predicament that hinges on violence which nevertheless demands justice. What then is justice if the option to have responded differently has passed? Yet again, Muckelbauer is not wrong when he names this process “the impure law of impossible ethics;” it is simply that there’s no alternative. Davis, speaking specifically about Lévinas’s notion of the Third, which I’ll

take up next, writes that the obligation to justice is “never not terrible, never not tragic---it is always a betrayal of the other” (255). Furthermore, Davis writes:

I will never be off the hook . . . I'll never get a clear conscience, I'll never be just enough, I'll never be able to say, finally, that 'I have acted responsibly.' Nonetheless, justice demands decisions, which are only possible, as Derrida so beautifully demonstrated, in the face of the undecidable. (255)

The rest of this chapter takes up this terrible obligation and its complicity with violence and, as we will observe, arrives at the conclusion that the most enviable judgment is not a choice between violence and nonviolence, but an occupation of the tension between language and its complicity with violence. To trouble out this difficulty, I will continue by first developing working definitions of three key Lévinasian concepts--the third, justice, and violence--and then consider a way forward for rhetorical studies through two conceits of the ethical rhetorical: language is always already a violence | language is a means to pursue justice.

C. The Third¹⁵

At the end of her response to Muckelbauer, Davis references the Third as throwing the ethical monkey wrench into our relationship with the other. As we've already noted, Davis quotes Lévinas to invoke the notion that “Justice demands

¹⁵ In this section, I am indebted to a number of personal exchanges with Drew Dalton and his insights on the Third.

judgment,” but she then continues to clarify that “If it were only me and the other to whom I am responsible, there would be no need for justice or judgment” (253). Here, Davis reminds us that the Lévinasian equation really is a zero-sum game in the other’s favor; the other gives me everything and, therefore, I owe the other infinitely: “I would owe the other everything without question, without comprehension, without the expectation of reciprocity” (Davis, “Fifth Risk” 253). The Third, what Lévinas also calls “the other other” (*Otherwise Than Being* 93), wrenches us out of our infinite obligation to the other and throws us a curveball: a second, infinite obligation to an other other. As Davis puts it, “With the approach of the third, the one-way street of my infinite responsibility is opened to multiple lanes of traffic” (254). The Third provokes a deep consideration of justice as its very presence forces a number of questions, overviewed by Lévinas, to the surface:

With the appearance of the Third, a host of new questions arise. Are both others the Other? How can the ego be infinitely responsible for more than one Other? Which Other should receive its attention first? What if one Other makes war on the other Other? Can the ego defend the Other against attacks from an-Other? If so, can the ego use violence, even kill an-Other in defense of the Other? (93)

Here, Lévinas recognizes that the metaphysical-ontological condition of our obligation to the other, at some point, spills out and wants a politics; and while Lévinas famously resists the drive to frame out a political system, he identifies that if we are infinitely obliged to the other and there is more than one other, then “Judgments must be made.

The ego must compare incomparable Others” (93). The appearance of the third requires a consideration of justice.

D. Justice

For Lévinas, justice is not a term that invokes a fundamental obligation to intrinsic human rights. Rather, justice is provoked as a means to account for infinite obligations to multiple others. “The equality of all is borne in my inequality,” he writes, “the surplus of my duties over my rights. The forgetting of self moves justice” (159). As such, the third provokes two intertwined considerations regarding the operation of justice: one, to whom do I respond first? To whom am I most obliged right now? Two, how do I respond when one other attacks another? How do I manage my obligations to two others when one threatens the third? On this last point Lévinas concludes that “There are people who are wrong” (“Ethics and Politics” 294); on both points, the co-editor of Lévinas’s early essays and commentator on Lévinas’s work, Adrian Peperzak, infers that these obligations imply a commitment to social justice:

My responsibility for this other here and now who faces me is not confined to him or her . . . My responsibility for you extends itself necessarily to all human others; it implies my responsibility for social justice and worldwide peace. (*To the Other* 167)

For Peperzak, the call to justice forces us to imagine that there’s something like a universal human essence, a set of inviolable human characteristics, when in fact there is only infinite obligations to an uncountable number of others. This is the difficulty of a Lévinasian ethics as it forces us to prop up fundamental claims as a mechanism by

which to distribute justice; this is what Davis means when she writes that justice “is always a betrayal of the other” (“The Fifth Risk” 255). Nevertheless, Peperzak concludes that justice in the face of the other other requires that, “I must divide my time and energy in order to respond to more than one revelation of the infinite” which means that we create a “social system that balances and guarantees at least the minimum of the absolute demands expressed by the other’s presence” (168). The necessity of a system that does this balancing, Lévinas reluctantly concludes, means that “there is a place for politics” (“Ethics and Politics 292). It’s not that Lévinas proposes a new socio-political order; not only would such a premise exceed his work as a phenomenologist it would also undermine the value of his phenomenological work. Lévinas is not idealistic nor fetishistic, but rather advocates for a more accurate accounting of the violence of systems that already might prompt actual, material change. As Peperzak puts it, the only justification for “the institutions of a political body” is their ability to enable justice for the other by taking into account the third. Moreover, Peperzak concludes that this justice is “not helped by good intentions or remorse and shame;” rather, “what counts is deeds of concern, objective goodness, and fair distribution of material goods: a work of economical justice” (177). William Paul Simmons reminds us, however, that this political work is never quite enough, that in its attempt we have “already reneged on [our] responsibility for the Other. Thus, Lévinas’ peculiar formulation: justice is un-ethical and violent” (94).

E. Violence

Thus, we are left with Lévinas's peculiar formulation that "justice is already the first violence" (Rötzer 62, qtd. in Simmons 94). Lévinas writes that morality does not begin out of the ego's justification of itself in the face of other self-justified egos (something like the necessity to respect the shared universal humanity in all others); rather, he writes that "Morality begins when freedom . . . feels itself to be arbitrary and violent" (*TI* 84). Here, Lévinas invokes freedom as described by the liberal imaginary, that independent subject which emerges out of that encounter with the Other that founds the freedom for subject to be possible in the first place. As such, the question of violence within a Lévinasian ethical rhetorical framework appears to take on two forms, and it is from within the difference between the two that we can begin to chart a way out of rhetorical and ethical paralysis: one, an avoidable violence, aligned with the machinations of power for profit, ego, survival, and so on; and two, an unavoidable violence that arises from my encounter with an Other. When Derrida considers Lévinas on violence in "Violence and Metaphysics" he identifies these two types of violence and names them phenomenological (or ontological) violence and metaphysical (or ethical) violence, respectively.

In Derrida's accounting of violence in Lévinas, phenomenology and ontology are "philosophies of violence" as they "unfold within the oppressive and luminous identity of the same" a plane in which "Everything given to me . . . appears as given to myself by myself" (113-14). On this trajectory of the same also appear oppression and totalitarianism, he contends, as they begin and end with the same, an ego given to me by me confronting an ego given to you by you. From here, the same enables all sorts of violences, complicities between knowledge and power (Wood 77). Ethical violence, on

the other hand, appears as the Other slips away into the Same, as the Saying gets lost in the Said. Here, Derrida refers to the wounding of language, “the wound or inspiration which opens speech and then makes possible every logos or every rationalism” (Derrida 121-22). As Sarah Wood puts it, “As far as Derrida is concerned, there is no neutral space within which dialogue and the trajectory towards the other could be made comprehensible” (81). The only way forward into comprehensibility is this violent negation of the other in language. To speak “I” confirms the unavoidable wrenching away from the Other through an opening which is a wound, an opportunity, and a response-ability. This does not put the I outside of the reach of responsibility for the Other; quite the opposite, for in pulling away for the I opens a space full of responsibility and indebtedness for the Other. Thus, to pursue justice in the ethical rhetorical is not to avoid violence; there is no option to do no harm. Rather, we find a just way forward by pitting one violence against another.

F. Language is Already a Violence | Language is Already a Means to Pursue Justice

If we are to work away from ontological violence (a violence of murder, power, and domination) and alongside an ethical violence (a discursive violence, the responsibility of our response-ability), we do so by paying close and careful attention to the intractability of violence with language and how that intractability affords the opportunity to move towards justice. Of course, we make this move fully aware that we’re tripping into the terrain of Davis’s fifth risk. There is no choice to be ethical that we might make here and now; the ethicality of our condition as language-using creatures thrusts us into the situation where language is already a compromised circumstance.

Yet, this space we occupy affords opportunities to examine discourse, and by way of examination, lean on it, directing our and its attention in one way or another. I refer here to the practice of deconstruction, what Critchley calls reading the Other way, as a means of exhibiting the possibilities which have already been closed off. At the same time, this section affirms Davis's argument that "Justice demands judgments" and Lévinas's assertion that "There are people who are wrong" (Davis 253; Lévinas, "Ethics and Politics" 294). To pursue this work, I'll write into the double assertion I've formulated as follows: language is already a violence | language is already a means to pursue justice. I'll arrive, finally, at the conclusion that some words are better than others.

When Lévinas describes the manner in which we comprehend the Other as partial violence, he's pointing to the function of language:

In relation to beings in the opening of being, comprehension finds a signification for them on the basis of being. In this sense, it does not invoke these beings but only names them, thus accomplishing a violence and a negation. A partial negation which is violence. This *partiality* is indicated by the fact that, without disappearing, those beings are in my power. Partial negation, which is violence, denies the independence of a being: it belongs to me. ("Is Ontology Fundamental?" 9, emphasis in original)

This is somewhat review by now, but here Lévinas is indicating that this partial negation, a particular type of violence, is one that necessarily comes along with the impulse to signify. Signification, he writes, "denies the independence of a being," the ability to signify is one that places the signified, partially, in my power. Thus, the ethicality of our

rhetorical condition (equally, the rhetoricity of our ethical condition) trades in partial negation, this discursive violence. Nevertheless, and thankfully so, this violence is only ever partial. As Lévinas indicates, there is always something which slips my grasp: “That which escapes comprehension in the other (*autrui*) is him, a being” (ibid). This is not just an academic distinction, but an important space of peace, as Lévinas and then Derrida will call it. This violence’s partiality indicates that there is never total negation of the other, that the Other always escapes and preserves a space of peace in the interaction of obligation and freedom. The only means to complete the negation of the other is, as Lévinas writes, to do so totally, “as *murder*. The Other (*autrui*) is the sole being I can wish to kill” (ibid, emphasis in original). Signification is functionally limited in that it does not ever fully possess the other. It’s being, as opposed to its signification, is always something that escapes. The only means for total negation is in the elimination of life; and yet, when I do, the other slips away again. Lévinas tells us that, “At the very moment when my power to kill realizes itself, the other (*autrui*) has escaped me . . . I can kill as I hunt or slaughter animals, or as I fell trees,” but when I do so “I have not looked him in the face . . . To be in relation with the other (*autrui*) face to face is to be unable to kill” (ibid). If I reach the point where I raise my hand to deliver a final blow, the other to whom I am responsible has already escaped.

In the face of these choices which are not choices to be made but observed, and in the face of the obligation to pursue the terrible, never-complete task of justice, those of us who attend to language can find a way through by looking to the work of deconstruction, for it is in deconstruction that we find a way through the fifth risk. In earlier chapters, we saw Davis argue that our task is to “expose exposedness” (loc.

140). Here, I want to argue that exposing exposedness is the posture one assumes through deconstruction when examining language; this posture attunes one's critical capacities to see in language what is already there, that, as Lévinas puts it, "To welcome the Other is to put into question my freedom" (*TI* 85). Before each other I am compromised; I am given a subjectivity whose sole task becomes a "[r]esponsibility for the others" (Lévinas, *OTB* 160). Lévinas then collapses this obligation with discourse itself, arguing that "[r]esponsibility for the others or communication is the adventure that bears all discourse of science and philosophy"; moreover, he continues, "... this responsibility would be the very rationality of reason or its universality, a rationality of peace" (*ibid*). Here is where Lévinas and, later, Derrida's view on peace and justice form an entirely different framework. Peace and justice are not just goals to achieve, targets at which to aim, but the ready condition of human mutual persuadability via communication. To be a language-using animal is already to occupy a domain of peace.

It's from this perspective -- one which collapses subjectivity with responsibility, responsibility with communication, and reason with peace -- that Lévinas's earlier statement in *Otherwise Than Being* becomes clearer: "Our task is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead to the said, to the putting together of structures which make possible justice and the 'I think'" (46). This sounds very much like Derrida's argument that "Deconstruction is justice," not that deconstruction leads to justice, or that deconstruction is a tool of justice, but that the practice of deconstruction is itself the formulation of justice laid out in the exposition of exposedness ("Force of Law" 945).

My point here is that Derrida engages justice but not as an active pursuit, as if justice were some place at which to arrive or some policy to implement, for, as Derrida

points out, “justice would be the experience that we are not able to experience” (947), and as Davis warns us, it's not as if it were experience-able we could make the choice to do so here and now; rather, Derrida orients us to deconstruction as a critical practice which exposes our infinite obligation to the Other within the *aporia* of signification. Thus, after Lévinas collapses “responsibility for the other” with “communication” itself, deconstruction becomes a means of revealing in all discourse the responsibility for the other on which discourse itself operates. As such, deconstruction does not so much pursue justice, but reveals its always already presence within language. Lévinas does not so much call us to do something different, but rather calls us to account for what we have already done. Infinite responsibility, exposed through deconstruction, presences the impossible contradiction of addressing the Other in the said. Thus, when Lévinas writes that, “The essence of reason consists not in securing for man a foundation and powers, but in calling him into question and in inviting him to justice” (TI 88), he is not inviting us to do something new, some new practice of justice that we have yet to begin. Instead, that we are always called into question is, in and of itself, an open invitation to justice we have already accepted. Facing into this contradiction through the practice of deconstruction precipitates the recognition, as Peperzak notes, that the contradiction of my infinite obligation to the Other and all other Others “can only be overcome by the opening up of a dimension in which all others are served, respected, and treated justly: the dimension of universal justice” (181). For as much as Derrida's work points to the origin of peace and justice in language, and not in say policy talk or rights discourse, we nevertheless end up there.

The trouble with this type of talk, or more rightly the trouble with our reaction to this type of talk, is that we immediately presume it means we must look forward and do something differently than we've done before. Where we were once unethical and not pursuing justice, we must now be ethical and pursue justice. This presumption misses the point that Lévinas and Derrida make. There is no doubt that judgments must be made, as Davis tells us. Ours is the terrible obligation of judgment in the face of infinite and incommensurable responsibility to all others. Things must and should be different. This, Weber instructs, "requires a wide-awake political awareness" (41). As Weber reminds us, because of the "infinite task and responsibility" a critical pursuit of justice "cannot be relegated to tomorrow" (Weber 38). Nevertheless, the lesson of Lévinas and Derrida is that the practical pursuits of justice must not shake off the terror of the task. As such, deconstruction is a refusal of the impulse to discard the solemnity of presuming to speak even in the name and pursuit of justice. When Peperzak characterizes our task as follows, "to live and die for the other accomplishes the ultimate meaning of a free and responsible mastery of oneself" (Peperzak 173), we must quickly remind ourselves of Davis's argument that there are no action heroes in this equation. Living and dying for the other requires the troublesome task of speaking for the other when one has no standing to do so, or more accurately, when one's standing to do so rests on the evacuation of the Other in the said. The pursuit of justice begins from a framework of ethical violence in an attempt to avoid ontological violence. If we are to think of rhetoric's ethics, it must always bear witness to this trouble.

Taking on this work requires an alternative approach to our narratives of rhetoric's ethicality. Take, for example, Cicero's mythic interpretation of the advent of persuasive rhetoric which turns on persuasion as a venerable alternative to brute force:

For there was a time when men wandered at large in the fields like animals and lived on wild fare; they did nothing by the guidance of reason, but relied chiefly on physical strength; there was as yet no ordered system of religious worship or social duties . . . nor had they learned the advantages of an equitable code of law. And so through their ignorance and error blind and unreasoning passion satisfied itself by misuse of bodily strength, which is a very dangerous servant. (Cicero 5-7)

Here, we see Cicero set up a framework where power and persuadability (such that it is) exerts itself through brutality and force. These people are not subjects, but bodies with needs and wants, and those needs and wants are satisfied, or not, as the result of physical conflict. In Cicero's account, the possibility of language as a peaceful alternative to violence lays dormant until it is invoked by a "great and wise" man:

At this juncture a man -- great and wise I am sure -- became aware of the power latent in man . . . Men were scattered in the fields and hidden in sylvan retreats when he assembled and gathered them in accordance with a plan; he introduced them to every useful and honorable occupation, though they cried out against it at first because of its novelty, and then when through reason and eloquence they had listened with greater attention, he transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk. (Cicero 5-7)

For Cicero, rhetoric and civility cofound one another, where rhetoric's apparently non-violent means drag humanity, "cr[ying] out against it," from violence into linguistic persuasion. This reading, however, makes two key forfeitures: first, it relegates persuadability to the end of the line of development, a tool that enables the drawing out of a pre-existing sociality; second, it presumes rhetoric to be an ethically clean alternative to violence. Cicero's persuasion is a means to achieve civilizing ends without bloodying one's hands.

Lévinas and Derrida prompt us to re-read Cicero's myth of rhetoric's invention in key ways. A full account of Cicero's text must read the orator first "'assembl[ing] and gather[ing]' his uncivilized brothers" as his hopeful recognition of his brothers' persuadability, his observation of their inessential solidarity. We must also read the orator's introduction to "every useful and honorable occupation" as evidence that before delivering his oratory, his brethren stopped and listened; they first saw him as the Other too. What Cicero gets right here is that the assembling and gathering is an index of mutual persuadability; it is a moment of a face-to-face encounter that is prior to speech but entirely rhetorical. Davis will call this "inessential solidarity." Here, alterity's affront prompts the choice to either kill the other's body or to see an other which is not me and to speak, acknowledging our mutual, fundamental, and always prior rhetoricity. Later decisions to "submit to justice without violence" are not because speaking is a non-violent and therefore preferable means to the same civil ends. Rather, what we're observing in Cicero's myth is a moment of interchange from ontological violence, a violence of brute force visited upon bodies, to an ethical violence which, through the wounding of language, calls us to account for our infinite obligation to all others.

There is a temptation here to agree with Muckelbauer and confirm that “appropriation is appropriation,” that “one appropriating discourse is no less appropriating than any other” (245). This temptation swings two ways: it’s a potential critique of looking to the compromising position of language for a weak point where justice might break through; likewise, it has the potential to acquiesce to “political quietism” (Mailloux, *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism* 3), accepting if language too wounds then there’s not much to be done. We must resist both of these temptations. “Judgments must be made,” Davis tells us. Lévinas asserts that “There are people who are wrong” and Weber reminds us that this work requires “a wide-awake political awareness.” I would add to this list of directives that some words are better than others. What deconstruction as a practice of justice evidences is that there is discourse which contradicts its own metaphysical condition. The point is not to unpack such claims as “black students should write Etandard American English” and “Students have a right to their own language” and conclude that these assertions share the same ethical rhetorical condition and are therefore equivalent. Instead, our work should pressure discourse whose claims refuse to acknowledge their own intractability from an infinite responsibility for the Other. There is no contradiction in arguing that all language shares an ethical foundation at the same time one defends the claim that some words are better than others.

In a late interview with *The New York Times*, James Baldwin makes this same point in terms of the African American religious tradition and his articulation of it is instructive for our purposes. Responding to the question, “What are you a witness to?” Baldwin responds as follows:

Witness to whence I came, where I am. Witness to what I've seen and the possibilities that I think I see . . .

. . . I am a witness. In the church I was raised you were supposed to bear witness to the truth. Now, later on, you wonder what in the world truth is, but you do know what a lie is. ("James Baldwin - Reflections of a Maverick")

For Baldwin, and I think for practitioners of deconstruction as a pursuit of justice, witness operates an equivalent to discursive practices that draw attention to the interplay between the saying and the said and to their generativity. This work acknowledges from "whence [the subject] came" and the "possibilities that [the subject] think[s it] see[s]". Deconstruction might be in uncertain terrain about what to do as it "wonder[s] what in the world truth is," but as a practice, deconstruction is acutely aware of "what a lie is" and what discourses stand at odds with their own ethical rhetoricity. In the same interview, Baldwin is asked, "What's the difference between a spokesman and a witness?" He responds: "A spokesman assumes that he is speaking for others. I never assumed that" (ibid)--points us towards the position deconstruction takes up in relation to the other; it does not speak for the other, but bears uncomfortable witness to the intractability of the subject's difficult obligation to the other.

G. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I posed a central problem in the form of a question: How can Lévinasian metaphysics assist rhetorical theory in contending with the impossibility of avoiding the violence of its practices? The answer lies somewhere in the realization that the wounds of language are both openings and witnesses: they are

the openings through which the said testifies to the saying and they are witness to discourses which patch over, ignore, or suppress the erasure of the saying.

Deconstruction thus affirms an active engagement with the face of the other and this affirmation maintains the other in face to face relation. Every moment I maintain the “relation with the Other face face” is another moment when I am “unable to kill” (Lévinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental? 9). Deconstruction bears witness to this the relation with the other, staves off ontological violence, and opens a hush before we speak another word.

V. TO TEACH OR TO BE TAUGHT AFTER LÉVINAS

“To have meaning is to teach or to be taught, to speak or to be able to be stated.”
(Lévinas, *TI*, 97)

“After reading Lévinas, what could it mean for me as a teacher to view my students as
‘bringing me more than I can contain’?

(Strhan 36)

A. The Argument

The difficulty of a Lévinasian framework for a field like composition studies is that it resists the compulsion to say what one ought to do. It is not as if Lévinas’s work is a heuristic one might take and use to generate course outcomes that we could call ethical. Rather, as we explored in the previous chapter, if the ethical rhetorical is to be used as any kind of guide for practice, it does so in its ability to draw attention to the push and pull between two violences, to push the of the said and the pull of the saying, or, to return to Davis’s phrase, in its ability to be the exposition of exposure. The SRTOL resolution can be re-read within these vulnerable terms as a rupture, a wounding, itself the call of the Other appearing in language that exposes exposedness and demands a reply. It is not just, however, that SRTOL can be read as a wound that foregrounds violence, but in so doing SRTOL highlights the practical necessity of doing just that – foregrounding our vulnerability. Such a foregrounding, I contend, offers up to writing studies a relatively clear pedagogical imperative: to promote peace and justice in the wake of our ever-present vulnerability. But what does that mean for a teacher of writing precisely?

Violence and vulnerability hover over this chapter, an ethical inheritance which points us to good writing, writing that treads lightly and speaks of our vulnerability. To work through this inheritance with an eye towards teaching, this chapter makes three moves. First, the chapter reads pedagogical responses to SRTOL the other way to vivifying the violence and vulnerability of the writing encounter and draws attention to the centrality of vulnerability in such pedagogical frameworks. The second move attempts to make sense of Lévinas's own discussion of teaching to sort out vulnerability in the case of SRTOL by activating Lévinas's notion that "to teach" is an other way to name that which happens to the subject when it springs forth from an encounter with an Other: "[i]t is a teaching," Lévinas writes (TI 98). The chapter then examines rhetorical scholarship that offers up approaches for the teaching of writing under the weight of violence and vulnerability. What we observe are not so much recommendations, but attempts at cultivating a Lévinasian ethical disposition within writing studies at the point where the pedagogical is inherently political. We return here to that opening question of this project: What is good about writing? Here, I take up Victor Vitanza's operative question in "Abandoned to Writing" as a pedagogical and moral ethical cultivations: "What does the writing want?" ("Abandoned to Writing: Notes Toward Several Provocations").

As possible replies, I examine the performative effectiveness of writing in the middle voice and writing the subject's dispossession in the work of Diane Davis's and Michael Bernard-Donals respectively as means of cultivating an ethical disposition. Importantly, both the middle voice and dispossession are attempts to hear the ethical call of language itself. That said, neither dispossession nor the middle voice -- the

middle voice has a particularly troublesome history to work through -- are perfect models for a rhetorical practice consistent with Lévinasian ethical paradigms; they do, however, offer a practice for maintaining what Pat Gehrke calls, “pained attentiveness”:

Every act of language is another act of colonizing violence . . . Since I cannot avoid perpetuating violence in my use of language . . . I must struggle with the risk of all discourse, recognizing the danger that is carried in my every use of language . . . In a hypersensitivity both to language’s colonizing of the Other and to my simultaneous obligation to respond, I might find the possibility of speaking with pained attentiveness.
(Gehrke 17)

Dispossessing the subject and writing in the middle voice, I contend, are ways of “speaking with pained attentiveness” as they face into and draw attention to our vulnerability. As such, I point to them as ways that some scholars have attempted to bridge from the ethical rhetorical to the political.

B. Writing Vulnerability in SRTOL

Up to this point, discussions of SRTOL and its impact on students have not contended with Lévinas and the ethical relationship with the Other that emerges from infinite obligation and its inherent vulnerability. Rather, the good of SRTOL has mostly mapped to the positions that define the culture wars. For some, as Geneva Smitherman puts in the Foreword to *Students’ Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook*, “the assertion of student language rights was inextricable from our national and international quest for social justice” (v). For others, the good of SRTOL is determined

to be lacking, to some degree, because it doesn't acknowledge that speaking a variant dialect keeps one out of the workforce and separate from mainstream society. In both accounts, however, the language one speaks and writes, regardless of dialect, is instrumentalized as the tool one uses to engage, or not engage, or not be permitted to engage in particular ways with the world. Importantly, in all of these cases, language is operationalized to achieve good ends. This chapter and this project have worked to demonstrate a different take, not only on SRTOL, but on language itself. Namely, I've been working towards the now perhaps too simply stated argument that to write is to encounter the Other. As such, I do not approach SRTOL as a discourse that doesn't respond to the Other—as we've explored, such a thing is impossible—but rather as an opportunity to read discourses around SRTOL as engagements with the Other in their multiplicity. Doing so contextualizes the judgments that are made within an ethically textured reading which allows for careful, and limited, assessments of the validity of those judgments. I take up here the conclusion of the previous chapter that some words are in fact better than others, but make that judgment within SRTOL via an evaluation of language practices that either lean towards or away from an honest accounting of the violence and vulnerability inherent in speech and writing precisely as it engages the Other. In other words, I'm asking, What does the SRTOL resolution want?

To respond, I want to consider a section of the 2015 anthology, *Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook*. This collection is one in a series of professional sourcebooks for compositionists published by Bedford/St. Martin's in cooperation with the National Council of Teachers of English and made freely available to faculty members who use Bedford/St Martin's products in their classes. Clearly

sympathetic with the intention of the SRTOL resolution, the sourcebook begins with key documents related to the resolution, then surveys the way SRTOL is remembered in the collective memory of the profession, and then focuses its attention on two areas of specific interest: African American linguistic forms in the first, and pluralism and hybridity in the second. It's in the fifth and penultimate section, however, where I want to consider the engagement with the Other in writing. This section, "Critical Language Perspectives and Reimagining SRTOL in Writing Classrooms," positions itself as a set of pedagogical resources which current compositionists can study and potentially adapt to their own practices. There are six essays in this section:

1. "Myth Education: Rationale and Strategies for Teaching Against Linguistic Prejudice" - Leah A. Zuidema
2. "Pedagogies of the 'Students' Right' Era: The Language Curriculum Research Group's Project for Linguistic Diversity" - Scott Wible
3. "From Language Experience to Classroom Practice: Affirming Linguistic Diversity in Writing Pedagogy" - Kim Brian Lovejoy, Steve Fox, and Katherine V. Wills
4. "The Reflection of 'Students' Right to Their Own Language' in First-Year Composition Course Objectives and Descriptions" - Stuart Barbier
5. "Critical Language Awareness in the United States: Revisiting Issues and Revising Pedagogies in a Resegretated Society" - H. Samy Alim
6. "Revisiting the Promise of Students' Right to Their Own Language: Pedagogical Strategies" – Valerie Felita Kinloch

As the titles suggest, this collection of essays is sympathetic to SRTOL and its political leanings. Their pedagogical content, however, is not under examination here. Rather,

asking of these essays “What does the writing want?” exposes our vulnerability to one another in three ways: it exposes writing as that which ruptures, exposes, and demands a reply.

1. The Rupture

In both Scott Wible’s and Stuart Barbier’s essays, SRTOL figures as a rupture within the field. Attempting to recover the work of the Language Curriculum Research Group (LCRG) as evidence against the belief that SRTOL has never actualized into a classroom practice, Wible references Michael Pennell who notes that SRTOL and its documents are “rhetorical ghosts with no substance below the ink and paper that [they] embody” (qtd. in Wible 354). Oppositely, Barbier’s article considering the impact of SRTOL on first-year composition course objectives and descriptions begins by quoting Geneva Smitherman. Smitherman describes the reception of SRTOL as having “had the effect of a bomb being dropped right in the midst of the English profession” (qtd. in Barbier 406). Setting aside the disputed history of SRTOL between Pennell’s and Smitherman’s account, both Wible and Barbier position SRTOL as an interruption. In Wible’s work, SRTOL is a rhetorical ghost, an engagement with others that took life, however briefly, but now carries on as an apparition, a shadow of what it was. In Barbier’s work, SRTOL is a bomb, a shattering of what was. What both share is this perception that SRTOL appeared and disappeared. Its appearance in writing forces a particular engagement with Other(s); that engagement is subsequently lost to the writing, but the trace thereof carries on. In Wible, that engagement haunts and, in Barbier, the radius of its impact is still being assessed and the shards of that shattered engagement are still being recovered. Whether a ghost or a bomb, the rupture between

others that SRTOL indexes never quite materializes in either Wible's or Barbier's text; both indirectly reference the ghost or the bomb at arms-length by quoting Pennell and Smitherman, respectively. The discursive encounter is lost to Wible and Barbier, but the vulnerability it exposes is available through Pennell and Smitherman's writing of it. As such, SRTOL ruptures doubly, first as a ghost or bomb, and then as the trace thereof recorded in Pennell and Smitherman and quoted in Wible and Barbier.

2. The Exposition

Unintentionally, the collection of essays that make up the fifth section of the SRTOL *Critical Sourcebook* also expose our vulnerability to one another. They demonstrate, as it were, that we are exposed to the Other each time we speak and write. Reflecting on his experiences as a teacher of first-year writing after SRTOL, Steve Fox describes the difficulty of teaching Edited American English. As he writes, is he the holder of a student's "ticket to success" and "a way out of dead-end jobs," or is he "like a missionary from another culture" which "no matter how beneficent the intentions of its purveyors, remains a sometimes oppressive culture" (Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 393)? Notice in his response to questioning his own position how his own vulnerability and complicity with violence rise to the top of the text:

I am not parroting politically correct jargon or spouting empty rhetoric. I am not trying to compensate for my sense of guilt at my part in this cultural and social drama, nor do I wish to lay a guilt trip on other English teachers. English language and writing instruction can be a source of liberation . . . [b]ut we have to see it for what it is, in all its manifestations.

We have to see the “violence of literacy” [Stuckey 1990]. (Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 393)

Here, Fox begins with a series of negations, “I am not parroting . . . spouting . . . compensate[ing] . . . lay[ing] a guilt trip” which lead him to clarify a central ethical ambiguity at the center of his work. As he puts it, teaching language and writing is both liberatory and violent. Of course, I think his definitions of liberation and violence are different than those I am activating in this project. The point, I contend, is that at the center of Fox’s work as a teacher is both an obligation to an actual other that necessitates violence; moreover, the exposition of Fox’s subjectivity as vulnerable (i.e., the series of self-directed negations) is dependent on the duplicity of his encounter with an Other, the operative co-constitution of obligation and violence in the Face of the Other. Much like the double interpretations of SRTOL that point to SRTOL as a rupturing discursive engagement with Others, Fox’s work inadvertently indicates how SRTOL exposes our exposedness by pointing to an operative duality, an activation of violence and obligation that cannot precede without one another. To be obliged is to violate; we are exposed.

3. The Reply

Lastly this section of the SRTOL *Critical Sourcebook* demonstrates that rupture and our exposedness therein demand a reply. Reaching again for Smitherman to contextualize the response to SRTOL, Valerie Felita Kinloch argues that the SRTOL resolution made it so that “you could no longer ignore language and dialect diversity” (Smitherman qtd. in Kinloch 432). Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills indicate that responses include “resign[ing] missionary posts” or “respecting students’ right to their own

language” (396). Alternately, H. Samy Alim argues that a further re-segregation of American society is a different kind of response to SRTOL, one created by deepening of the chasm between Black and White speakers of variant English dialects (“Critical Language Perspectives” 418). Responses to SRTOL also include the refusal to reply, as many compositionists, Kinloch reports, respond with “a lot of silence” (429). The point here is not that there is a range of responses or that this range of responses maps to what I call in Chapter Two progressive, liberal, and conservative responses; rather, the point is that that to respond is the only thing to do in the Face of rupture and exposure to the Other. Here, SRTOL demonstrates that, as Davis puts it, “response-only mode is the sole option for any subject” (“Addressing Alterity” 251), which is perhaps why Kinloch notes that compositionists respond, not with silence, but “a lot of silence.” Even this seemingly non-responsive modality is full of responsivity.

The goal of the section of the SRTOL *Critical Sourcebook* from which I draw these cases is to “reimagine SRTOL in the writing classroom” (339). My reading takes up this charge too, but in a much different way. What I’m offering up here by tracing rupture, exposure, and reply in SRTOL is another way of approaching the ethicality of the resolution, one which marks our vulnerability as indexed in and through writing. Teaching, so it seems, is at the center of attempts to cultivate a sensitivity to this ethical condition.

C. The Other Teaches

To dig us out from under Descartes and the *cogito*, Lévinas frames out a description of knowledge in a section of *Totality and Infinity* that, as the title suggests, links “Truth and Justice.” The link, Lévinas argues, speaks to the very nature of

knowledge itself for knowledge is framed in language, that is, in the exchange between the Other and I which founds my infinite obligation. Lévinas puts it this way, “To have meaning is to teach or to be taught,” and thus Lévinas makes language, truth, and justice synonymous with teaching in its infinite-ive forms (*TI* 97).

To be clear, when Lévinas describes teaching he is not referring to that thing a teacher does from the front of a classroom. Rather, as Anna Strhan argues in her book, *Lévinas, Subjectivity, Education: Towards an Ethics of Radical Responsibility*, “Teaching is, for Lévinas, the space of encounter with the Other in which subjectivity is revealed as ethical. In teaching subjectivity is constituted through Desire and goodness, both encountered through language” (20). Nevertheless, Strhan and others have leveraged this section of *Totality and Infinity* as resources for pedagogical frameworks, for, as we will see, Lévinas switches from a metaphor of encounter to one of teaching at the moment in his text when he wishes to push against Western philosophy’s Cartesian hold which positions knowledge and truth outside of experiencing the Other.

In this section of *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas is concerned with undermining conceptualizations of objective knowledge and truth as traditionally inherited through Descartes. Lévinas’s goal is to argue that comprehension happens at the same time that one puts oneself into question in the face to face encounter with the Other; for Lévinas, it is Other first, facts second. Knowledge is not free, objective, thinkable, or separate, but rather, as Lévinas puts it, knowledge is “the complete exercise of spontaneity [that] reconcile[s] my freedom with the freedom of others” (*TI* 83). The cogito and its objectification of knowledge is unthinkable, Lévinas argues, because knowledge’s prerogative is “to put itself into question” and in so doing always returns to

the Other, never to itself (*TI* 85). Objective or pure knowledge is an impossibility because it would require that “freedom . . . denounce its own contingency” which it cannot do without renouncing itself (87). Recall here that for Lévinas, freedom is not that liberalized form, but names the possibility of the subject borne in obligation to the Other. Taking this a step further than Lévinas would, I argue that what Lévinas offers us here is a framework for forcing obligation to resonate through every instance of the subject within the liberal imaginary. Thus, what Lévinas never fully articulates (a choice for which many readers praise him) is the dramatic political imperative that the saying rings out in the said, that each time the *Moi* makes a claim to know (I know the sky is blue, let’s say), that we ought to hear it echoing dependence on the Other. The political and therefore pedagogical ends of cultivating a Lévinasian ethics become apparent when we recognize that what echoes back from the declaration “I am” is not simply “I am,” but “here I am.” The subject is always a presentation of itself in obligation to all Others.

Thus, it’s not just knowledge that is at stake here. In his work on “Teaching Otherwise”, Carl Säfström argues that humanist or modern views of knowledge and education dehumanize, or renounce, us because they assume that knowledge is outside of our encounters and therefore “one has to be taught in order to become a part of humanity, to become a self-fulfilled rational subject” (21). Knowledge, and therefore teaching, is instrumentalized, Säfström contends, and therefore stripped of its orientation through encounter. “[E]xistence for itself is not the ultimate meaning of knowing,” Lévinas asserts, “but rather the putting back into question of the self . . . in the presence of the Other” (*TI* 88). “To know” and “to be” require the presence of an Other,

which is why Lévinas reaches for a new metaphor. From here, Lévinas begins working his way toward conceptualizing teaching (to teach or to be taught) as the counterweight to problematic views of knowledge because teaching, knowledge, and language all work in the same way: in relation.

“To posit knowing as a welcoming of the Other,” Lévinas writes, “is the condition of language” (*TI* 88). His point is that, on one hand, the Other enables the possibility of signification – which differentiates him from structuralists like Saussure, as Strhan points out (27-28); it’s not that language indexes the other, but rather that the approach of the Other is the-precondition for signification. Put another way, it teaches. On the other hand, Lévinas is simultaneously drawing out the relationship between justice and language. Justice needs language, for the “silent world” (that is, the world without language), Lévinas argues, “would be an-archic, without principle, without a beginning” (*TI* 90), precisely because of language’s relationship to the Other. The Other approaches and, in demanding a reply, enables language and grounds justice. In other words, I am taught. Here, Lévinas responds quite directly to Descartes’ readers and questions the primacy of the *cogito*, essentially arguing that to speak “I” in the phrase, “I think therefore I am” is an attempt to ground one’s subjectivity in an independent infinity, which Lévinas contends, is impossible because the “I” is always and already founded in the infinite obligation to the Other (*TI* 92-93). The *cogito* is always preceded by the obligation to the Other, he argues. In Lévinas’s words, the attempt at objectivity (for the “I”, for knowledge) is an attempt to hide away the appearance of the Other, to “render the apparition posterior to signification” (*TI* 94). This posterior rendering would be a denial of things as they actually are; because signs only work in relation, if knowledge

were objective and independent of communication, things would lose meaning as the knowledge of them slips through signification's grasp (*TI* 94-95). "Things begin to take on signification," he writes, "in the care of the being that is still 'on the way'" (*TI* 95). It is being's status as infinitely "on the way" that keeps signification going, that ground justice (i.e., the infinite obligation), and that gives rise to knowledge. As such, "to teach, or to be taught" is the conceptual corrective to "I think therefore I am" because teaching foregrounds language as that which puts me into relation with the Other and in which knowledge is experienced.

Lévinas's deployment of teaching, then, is not immediately applicable to what we would call pedagogy. As Strhan indicates, what Lévinas is describing is a space of encounter when the Other produces the conditions necessary for knowledge. Moreover, Lévinas's description of teaching is decisively non-instrumental. Just a page after making the statement that "To have meaning is to teach or to be taught, to speak or to be able to be stated" (*TI* 97), Lévinas continues as follows: "Language is exceptional in that it attends its own manifestation. Speech consists in explaining oneself with respect to speech; it is a teaching" (*TI* 98). Lévinas's point here, and this is crucial, is that teaching and language--and therefore knowledge--are not waiting around for the subject to acknowledge them. They manifest themselves in the generative experience with the Other. "It is a teaching," Lévinas writes, never, I teach. This is why I've begun to think in terms of cultivation, whereby a teacher invites students into a set of conditions that make hearing the ethical possible. Nevertheless, a number of scholars in the field of education have attempted to chart Lévinas's notion of teaching as described here to

the professional work of teachers, which act for us as a precursor to more specific adaptations of Lévinas's work in the field of writing studies.

Carl Säfström, in "Teaching Otherwise," considers how Lévinas's teaching might be taken up by educators for pedagogical ends. He begins by opening a query into what he calls "the conditions for understanding teaching as an act of responsibility toward an other . . . revealed for the teacher by the question: have I the right to teach?" (19). Here, Säfström attempts to position the central Lévinasian insight about the ethical relations' impact on the nature of knowledge: it is a relation that always puts into question the right to speak. From this position, Säfström acknowledges, and we discussed this earlier, that conceptions of knowledge as extrinsic to human relations in fact dehumanizes us; knowledge is transactional in this model and therefore disconnected from our ethical (i.e. relational) condition. Such a humanist model of knowledge, Säfström claims, keeps teachers "on the safe side of knowledge" where educators are dispensers and gatekeepers (22). Whatever relationality this safe structure of knowledge does presume is one based on commonality, Säfström argues, never difference and dialogue (25).

To put oneself into question and to come to grips with incommensurability is, for Säfström, about registering the precariousness and danger of the teacher's position in relation to the student, that is, a relationship of infinite obligation. This reversal in Säfström's work shifts the focus from what the teacher has (i.e., knowledge) to what the student has (i.e., value). Säfström puts it this way:

. . . for ethics to “begin” in teaching, the teacher, the I, “apprehends” the value of the student, of the You. This value of the You comes to the fore within the immediacy of the relation, the dialogue without any general principle for determining the mean of the student.

It is the exposure to the other in which a risk is taken, a risk to suffer without reason, for nothing. (25)

Diane Davis would have us remember that the risk Säfström describes here is, of course, not a risk one can actually choose to take. The Fifth Risk warns us away from assuming that engaging the Other is some risky act that brave teachers could take on, intentionally, here and now. Säfström seems to recognize this potential pitfall and does not recommend that teachers take greater risks, but rather Säfström’s work is similar to Davis’s in that he’s trying to call educators to account for what has already taken place. “Teaching otherwise,” he argues, is “understood as a process in which an ego is sobering up from itself being itself and awakens to humanity, as a being for the other” (28). This image of the ego drunk on its own humanism, now being nursed to sobriety by Lévinas is the strength of Säfström’s work because it points to what teachers ought to do: sober up. It is only the stone-cold sober subject that can ask “Have I right to teach?” and be satisfied that there’s no complete answer, but there is a question “continuously answered within the teaching that actually takes place” (28). Thus, for Säfström, teaching is about a “history of responses to another, as a history of responsibility for the other” which at every given exchange the teacher is “answerable to the student and [must] defend the rights of the student from a position of vulnerability” (28).

Whereas Säfström's work is primarily a philosophical treatment of the teacher's conception of oneself as an educator, Paul Standish's "Lévinas and the Language of the Curriculum" considers how a Lévinasian disposition alters the curriculum itself. Without getting caught up in advocating this lesson plan or that one, Standish begins by separating his work from what he describes as common misapplications of Lévinas's work in education: first, Standish pulls Lévinas's talk of the Other away from an easy alignment with bland versions of multiculturalism; next, Standish, warns against conflating Lévinas's focus on dialogue with something like the educational push for "better communication"; third, Standish reminds us that Lévinas's teaching refuses the "rarefied and detached" "vocabulary of transcendence" that pervades education (think here of those educational aphorisms like "you'll find yourself"); and finally, Standish corrects the common misreading of poststructuralist thought as truth averse (56). Instead of easy, economical uptakes of Lévinas in educational theory, Standish wants to think of what he calls the "aneconomical" nature of education, that feature of education where something "forever breaks with or exceeds" a circle of exchange (58).

For Standish, the educational aneconomy is one where the curriculum is a location where "the relation to the Other can be realized" (64). The function of the aneconomy is another way of describing what I've come to call cultivation. The aneconomy functions this way when the curriculum, the teacher, and the learner are oriented to language, knowledge, and education in particular ways. The curriculum "should open ways beyond what is directly planned" the "content matter that is intrinsically rich . . . defies easy assimilation and mastery" combine with assessments which remain open as long as possible in perceiving the subject matter as "limitless" (64). The teacher of such a

curriculum, Standish claims, should continually “point to a beyond” the subject matter and its mastery, should serve as a “conduit” to the limitlessness of the subject and “the questions it raises” (64). This teacher and this curriculum assume a particular type of learner, too. For Standish, the “learner should come to see herself less as the owner of her learning than as one possessed by it, less as mastering the subject than as being in its service” (65). Taken together, Standish seems to lay out in somewhat more practical terms what it means for an educator to, in Säfström’s words, “sober up” from one’s own humanism. If Säfström calls educators to take serious stock of how they operate in relations with Others, then Standish provides a crash course on what teaching otherwise might look like. In their broad strokes, Säfström and Standish are making important strides in moving forward toward articulating just what Lévinas’s work means, practically, for educators — Standish’s opening move separating teaching otherwise from multiculturalism is a worthwhile contribution all on its own. That said, their work seems to miss something necessary, namely a thorough consideration of how language functions in teaching. It’s not that Säfström and Standish don’t attend to language; they certainly do. What they miss, however, is the collusion of language with violence that I explore in the previous chapter. The issue is that neither Säfström or Standish seem to fully work through what it means that each time an educator “point[s] to a beyond,” to use Standish’s phrase, that he or she does so in language which is always and already a betrayal of that beyond. To cultivate a sensitivity to the ethical-rhetorical cannot forget the uncomfortable proximity of violence.

Writing in the special issue of the *Journal of Advanced Composition* focused on Lévinas, Grant Matthew Jenkins takes on “The Ethics of Teaching: or, Beyond

Rhetoric.” His work is important because it grafts rhetoric into Standish’s and Säfström’s conversation teaching otherwise, and does so by foregrounding the unavoidable problem of violence, something Standish and Säfström’s do not do. As such, Jenkins is the rhetorician we will consider who, as soon as the conversation shifts to language and teaching otherwise, pivots to violence.

Jenkins marks this pivot, first by acknowledging his coming to Lévinas looking for prescription, and, second by making prescriptions of his own for how we ought to attend to violence. His essay begins with the admittedly difficult task of locating prescriptions within a body of work of a philosopher loathe to make prescriptions. Jenkins locates two prescriptions which he qualifies as follows:

What I mean by “prescription” is two things: 1) that Lévinas does indeed prefer and promote peace and justice to its alternatives of war and oppression . . . and 2) that the Other demands, i.e., prescribes, obligation to respond and, eventually, act. (562)

I think that Jenkins’ move here is an important one because he articulates what a pedagogy of the other might, in fact, look like – a pedagogy of peace and justice that responds. These terms – peace, justice, response – are not the worn-out democratic versions, but the other-centric version borne of the possibility of infinite obligation.

That which this pedagogy teaches against, war and oppression, is equally important, not because war and oppression are the opposites of peace and justice, but because war and oppression are constitutively in play with peace and justice. The presence of the Third and the ethical components of violence mean that war and oppression are never off the table. We are never clear of them, which is why Jenkins’

work goes to great lengths to put us in our place, as it were. He sketches three parabolas to describe where the subject (in this case, the teacher) stands in relation to the other. The first, the Ethical Parabola (see Fig. 1), demonstrates that The Other engages the self, the Other gives the self its impetus through conversation. Jenkins then adapts the parabola, switching out the self with the Student, but in this case, the Student is still the teacher, awash in the overflow, the gift the Other gives (see Fig. 1). Lastly, Jenkins plays the parabola out again with self as Teacher who still, regardless of the optics, is always in last place (see Fig. 3). Jenkins' point puts us in our place: "I speak—I teach—because I am compelled to do so by the face of the other person, the student;" put another way, "I am always, figuratively and literally last . . ." (578).

From back here, Jenkins pulls on Derrida's distinction between ontological and ethical violence to call teachers to attend to the possibilities of violence in their own practice. He writes that we must "avoid the 'ontological violence' of current practices" by "paying attention to the danger of trespass, to moments when one threatens to violate the 'sacredness' of others' practices, or threatens to identify with [another's] experience and claim it as one's own" (585). It appears that this is where Jenkins' work has been driving, to this call to attention to the possibility of violence and the imperative to avoid it. This is both unique, when considered against Standish and Säfström, and limited when contrasted with Davis and Bernard-Donals.

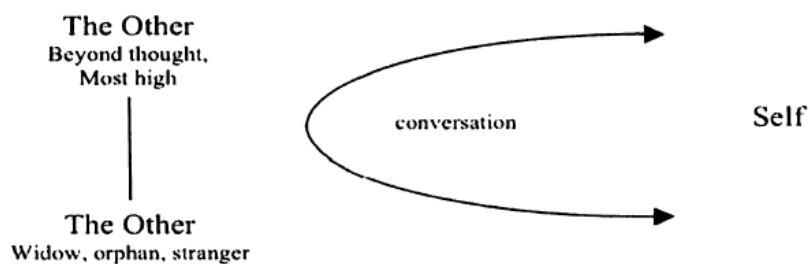


Figure 1. The Ethical Parabola

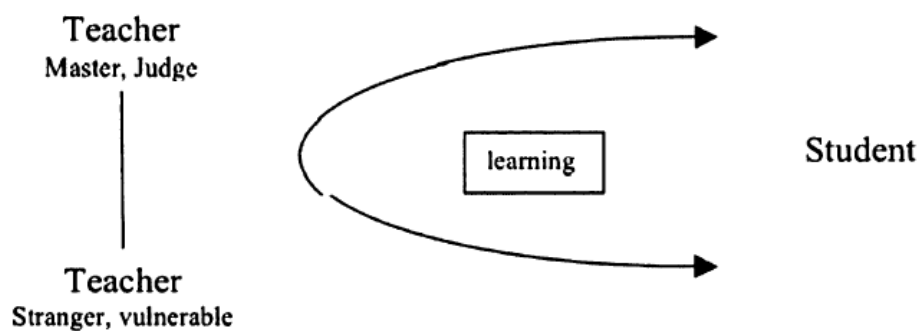


Figure 2. Ethical Parabola with me as student.

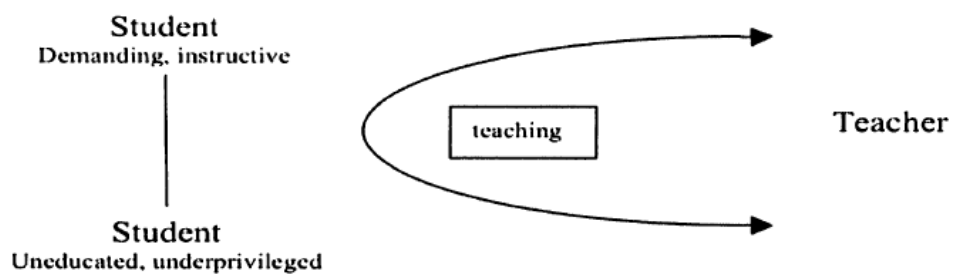


Figure 3. The Pedagogical Parabola – Ethical Parabola with me as teacher.

Those writing in philosophy of education don't directly attend to the possibilities of violence as Jenkins does; however, Jenkins' call to avoid "ontological violence" does not go far enough to fully consider that other violence, what Derrida calls ethical violence and the wound of language. Rightly, Jenkins calls us to avoid ontological violence but stops short of accounting for the violence inherent in discourse itself. Those considering Lévinas in writing studies — and here I'm referring to, Diane Davis, Michael Bernard-Donals, and, indirectly, Victor Vintanza— are attempting to more directly work through language and teaching because they directly confront writing's intractable relationship with violence.

C. What Writing Wants: Pained Attention

Writing under the weight of violence, Diane Davis, Michael Bernard-Donals, and Victor Vintanza collectively reframe the uptake of Lévinas's notion of teaching for educators by moving away from what people do, to what writing does. Such a move, I contend, is a possible means of cultivating a pained attentiveness to the ethical rhetorical. Davis will call it speaking in the middle voice, Bernard-Donals will call it the "dispossess[ion of] the writer" (412), and Vintanza will simply proclaim "WRITING WANT! Just WANTS" ("Abandoned to Writing", emphasis in original). These dispositions identify writing itself as a means of addressing the Third, that is, writing is a means to conceptualize collective justice because it offers a way of thinking a "we" which, the best it can, does not over-write the Face of the Other. Collectively asking "what the writing wants" is one means of cultivating pained attentiveness because it asks how rhetoric attends to violence and vulnerability. Moving to the middle voice, dispossessing the subject, or asking as Vintanza does, "What is it that writing wants?" ("Abandoned to

Writing”), is not an abandonment of responsibility, a reframing of agency to objects, or a lapse into the evil of infinity; rather, these dispositions are means to foreground the intractability of violence and language without collapsing under its weight. This is the unique contribution of writing studies to the discussion of education and Lévinas, and the contribution of Lévinas to writing studies: that teaching paid attention to language forces a confrontation with the wounding by language.

1. **Writing Wants You in the Middle**

Davis’ work on using the middle voice is an attempt within writing studies to cultivate a sensitivity to the ethical rhetorical and obligation to the Other, an attempt I’d like to consider alongside Bernard-Donals’ and Vitanza’s attempts below. An early essay from Diane Davis, “Finitude’s Clamor; or Notes Toward a Communitarian Literacy,” turns our attention to the impossibility of addressing one another without betraying infinite obligation. Like we saw in her exchange with Mailloux and Muckelbauer, Davis again turns toward impossibility and, this time, finds there resources with which to “elaborate[e] a kind of ‘communitarian literacy’” which might satisfy the “ethical imperative in our field today” (122). Writing in CCC, Davis articulates communitarian literacy as a concept which privileges open dialogue for writing pedagogy, an “attempt to open the conversation” (132). Example averse, much like Lévinas, Davis doesn’t offer explicit examples of what a communitarian literacy would look like, but instead offers a set of principles or premises that mark its edges. Whereas Jenkins calls us to avoid ontological violence by paying attention to the “dangers of trespass” (which we should), Davis’s work calls us to attend to that other violence, ethical violence, which is necessary to negotiate communitarian literacy.

Davis draws our collective attention to this ethical violence because it is a violence that cannot be otherwise. Thus, Davis makes a number of “notes toward a communitarian literacy,” indicating that such a literacy doesn’t emerge from a particular lesson plan or course objective, but from a set of dispositions which orient a community towards the ethical rhetorical and its inherent violence. Her “notes” range from acknowledging that the “writer” is always “be-coming,” that it’s impossible “to write without being-written,” and that “communitarian writers invite . . . [an] unworking of the text” (136-39). Importantly, Davis doesn’t abandon us to a set of conundrums, but rather presses us to see one thing and do another. First, I think, she wants us to see that “there is no way for I(dentity) to survive an engagement with writing. One does return from it, but . . . one returns broken” (137). Second, from the pieces of our broken selves, Davis wants us to respond to the violence of writing characterized by the active voice by moving to the middle voice. Here, Davis moves to recover the middle voice from its own tainted history to offer it as a modality for teaching pained attentiveness. She writes as follows:

Because this ‘over-writing,’ this becoming that writing entails is covered over by the bulldozer of immanence whenever writing is designated in the active voice, it may be helpful . . . to express the verb ‘to write’ in the middle voice. (137)

Here, Davis chooses a mode of writing that, from her perspective, honors the difficulty of the task of writing itself. The middle voice does not avoid violence any more than the first-person voice does – as I mentioned earlier, it is a violence that cannot be otherwise. Her recovery of middle voice is, however, an attempt to cultivate a light step.

Given Davis's commitment to the continental tradition of Derrida, Lévinas, and Heidegger, it might seem strange that Davis invokes the middle voice as both Derrida and Lévinas are deeply critical of Heidegger's activation of the middle voice.¹⁶ As Daniel Gross notes in *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, Heidegger's notion of the middle voice is typically understood as "the attempt to dissolve passion and action, subject and object" either in service of a progressive critique of the liberal subject or a conservative, "bureaucratic apathy" (18). The middle voice, thus, seems like a non-starter for thinking the ethical rhetorical, given both Lévinas's own project of recovering the subject "I" (*moi*) out from under the Ego (*Moi*) and Lévinas's critical reception of the middle voice from Heidegger because the middle voice disoblises the subject to speak and take responsibility for itself (Lévinas, "God and Philosophy: 72-73).¹⁷ As Derrida puts it, Heidegger's notion of the middle voice is "an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject on an object, or on the basis of the categories of agent and patient, neither on the basis of nor moving towards any of these terms" ("Margins of Philosophy" 9, qtd. in Gross 23). Davis, however, invokes the middle voice through a different genealogy—from Foucault and Barthes rather than Heidegger and Lévinas—precisely to offer up the middle voice as a resource for the subject to cultivate pained attentiveness. Before charting this alternate genealogy for rethinking the middle voice, I will overview Lévinas's concern with speaking in the middle voice.

¹⁶ It's worth noting that Heidegger does not directly discuss the middle voice; rather, as Charles E. Scott argues, Heidegger use of the middle voice in *Being and Time* "reorients thinking and calls into question Heidegger's own active purposes in his account of Dasein" (160).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Daniel Gross's *Heidegger and Rhetoric* re-assesses Heidegger's notion of the middle voice, noting that Derrida's characterization of the Heideggerian middle voice is simply incorrect (18-27).

A significant part of Lévinas's project is to recover the subject's ability to respond to the Other itself in its "very ipseity", a project distinct from the work of an Ego which, erroneously, imagines itself secured by its own, self-supported finitude (TI 279). Such an Ego has affinity with the troubled notion of what Lévinas calls the *il y a*, or There is. For Lévinas, the *il y a* represents an infinite form of existence unmoored from actual Others and is, therefore, horrifying in its abstraction. Lévinas describes the *il y a* as the experience of unarticulated forms of things perceived in the night: "There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not something," he writes, "There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence . . . There is, in general, without it mattering what there is . . ." (EE 58-59). Later, he describes the *il y a* as a "menace" precisely because, as Drew Dalton describes it, "the *il y a* . . . threatens to overwhelm subjectivity and collapse it into an indeterminate morass of being" ("Phenomenology and the Infinite" 44). Thus, for Lévinas, the subject "I" (*moi*) is an affront to the infinity of the *il y a* because "I" (*moi*) am the only one who can respond to the face of the Other. "Nobody," Lévinas writes, "can respond in its place" and thus "I" (*moi*) interrupt the possibility of infinite abstraction or the "ab[ility] to escape responsibility" ("Transcendence and Height" 17-18). For Lévinas, the subject who speaks "Here I am" or "I begin to speak" is an "I (*moi*) torn from the concept of Ego (*Moi*)," which means that I am "left . . . to a responsibility beyond measure" ("God and Philosophy" 144-146). The voice speaking "Here I am" is, in Lévinasian terms, the writerly disposition most consistent with the ethical rhetorical because it takes on its responsibility to the Other fully with no ducking behind middle or passive forms. While technically intransitive, Lévinas wants us to see how "Here I am" is

both active and transitive; the work of the I being (“I am”) is always tied to an implied object, the Other.

For Lévinas, the middle voice appears to be a way of letting the subject off the hook. In a strictly Lévinasian view, the prototypical middle-voiced construction which Davis invokes is “I am written,” understood by Davis as middle-voiced because the subject is simultaneously the implied object of the action (“Finitude’s Clamor” 137); this formulation could be described by Lévinas as a form of the *il y a*, *a* means “[t]o be infinitely . . . to exist without limits” as the subject is neither responsible for the action nor engaged with an object (TI 281). “I am written,” it seems, lines up with Lévinas’s other examples of the infinite menace of *il y a* --“it rains” or “it is warm” -- the “ambiguity” of which “pur[ifies] and simpl[ifies] presence” until it is independent of the face of the Other (EE 58-59): it offers a means for the subject to dodge its responsibility to the Other.

Why then would Davis invoke the middle voice as a way to avoid overwriting the Other in the active voice? The answer lies in the fact that when Davis invokes the middle voice she does so under two important and related caveats: first, Davis invokes an alternate genealogy of the middle voice in Foucault and Barthes, and second, she moves away from a phenomenological account in order to identify a potential practice for cultivating painted attentiveness. Given Davis’s longstanding engagement with Lévinas, not only in this essay but over her career, it initially seems strange that Davis does not address the Heidegger/Lévinas exchange on the middle voice, but instead invokes an alternate genealogy. I suggest that this alternate genealogy is crucial to Davis’s recovery of the middle voice precisely because it moves from a

phenomenological account of responsibility to an engagement of the middle voice as an available practice for writers. I quote Davis at length below to demonstrate the depth of her engagement with Barthes, Lyotard, and Cixous and the complete lack of engagement with Lévinas:

Because this “overwriting,” this be-coming that writing entails is covered over the bulldozer of immanence whenever writing is designated in the active voice, it may be helpful, as Roland Barthes has suggested, to express the verb “to write” in the middle voice, which indicates that the subject is affected, moved by the action of the verb. In the middle voice, the past tense of “to write” becomes “I am written,” which indicates not simple passivity (“somebody wrote me”) but a mode of receptivity on the part of one who writes, a “passability,” as Lyotard puts it [“Resisting” 403; *The Inhuman* 116-17], that is not simply inactive. This “I am written” indicates an agency that is situated and co-piloted, an agency whose radical creativity begins not by asserting an identity, but rather, as Helene Cixous observes, with “a leaving oneself go” [Cixous and Calle-Gruber 41]. (“Finitude’s Clamor” 137).¹⁸

Notice how Davis invokes Barthes, Lyotard, and Cixous in order to describe the functionality of the middle voice for writers to manage writing’s double role of imposing and exposing vulnerability. Importantly, the work Davis draws on—Barthes’ essay, “To Write an Intransitive Verb?”, Lyotard’s conversation with Gary A. Olson for the *Journal*

¹⁸ Davis incorrectly describes “I am written” as the past tense, when in fact “I was written” would be past tense. Her grammatical correctness aside, her theoretical point is that the middle voice operates as a conceptual figurative tool for imagining writing oneself as an act of vulnerability, not avoidance of responsibility.

of Advanced Composition, and Cixous's *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*—are all attempts by the three authors to address the work of writers writing. Doing so shifts the conversation around the middle voice from philosophy and phenomenology, to writing and praxis. This is an important move because it goes to center of the difficulty of adapting Lévinasian phenomenology to rhetorical practice.

This other genealogy of the middle voice, one which focuses on its rhetorical function, begins in Davis's work with Barthes. Hayden White notes in his consideration of "Writing in the Middle Voice" that Barthes's essay addresses the peculiarities of modern literary writing which, Barthes notes, appears as a writer who "no longer . . . writes something, but who writes absolutely" and is expressed as "I am written" (Barthes 18-19, qtd. in White 255). Here, Barthes responds to Foucault's argument in *The Order of Things* that intransitivity in literature appears in the 19th century after language is "demot[ed]" from the "medium" by which "the things of the world could be known" to one of many potential sites for intellectual inquiry (Foucault 296, qtd. in White 255). Foucault argues that literature emerges as a compensatory reaction to language's demotion and takes intransitivity as its defining feature. This "literary language," Foucault argues, "folds back upon the enigma of its own origin," is "wholly in reference to the pure act of writing," and has "nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being" (Foucault 299-300, qtd. in White 256). Here, Foucault's description of the intransitive, I contend, aligns with Lévinas's description of the evil of the excessive infinite which "exists without limits" (TI 281, "Transcendence and Evil" 180). White points out that Barthes begins by questioning whether this way of writing is intransitive or in the middle voiced (White 256). Barthes, however, questions whether literary language is

intransitive (it takes no object) or actually middle voiced (is its own object); he writes, “In the case of the middle voice . . . the subject affects himself in acting; he always remains inside the action, even if an object is involved. The middle voice, therefore, does not exclude transitivity” (Barthes 18, qtd. in White 256). White argues that here, Barthes makes the case that the middle voice “is not so much passiv[e]”, but rather expresses a “metatransitive relationship between an agent, an act, and an effect” (256).¹⁹

White goes on to argue that Barthes’s activation of the middle voice is not passive self-reflexivity but decidedly social and moral. He contends that while in Greek the middle voice identifies the subject’s “interiority” regarding particular actions (“I wash myself” and “I sell my house” are White’s examples), he contends that the middle voice is also “used especially to indicate those actions informed by a heightened moral consciousness on the part of the subject performing them.” For example, he observes that the active form of *airein* is “to take,” while in the middle voice it means “to choose;” likewise he identifies that the active form of *logou poiein* means “to compose a speech,” whereas in its medial form it means “to deliver a speech” (White 261). White’s point is that the middle voice designates reciprocity between subject and object. He writes as follows:

The differences here indicated between the active and the middle forms of the same verb have to do with the kind of consciousness on the part of the subject involved in the action indicated and the force of involvement of the subject in the action . . . It is not a matter of doing something, on the one

¹⁹ Of course none of our writers here are working with verb phrases as grammarians would. Rather, they are taking up rhetorical orientations they observe within verb phrases as an opportunity to make a larger point about the writer’s meta-disposition to language and subjects.

side, and having something done to one, on the other. It is a matter of distinguishing between two kinds of transitivity, one in which either the subject or the object is outside the action and one in which the distinction between subject and object is obliterated. (261)

While his final description of the obliteration of the distinction between subject and object likely strikes Lévinasian ears as troublesome, the point he's making is about the transitive relationship between subject and object. If the middle voice is indeed transitive, he argues, then it designates a relationship between subject and object; they are caught up together, where the action of the verb implicates the subject as both subject and object.

Davis gestures to Barthes to prompt a different consideration of the middle voice than the Heidegger-Lévinas-Derrida line of inquiry, one which is not about the abdication of responsibility wherein one tucks subjectivity into a corner of passive self-reflexivity, but one which is about acknowledging the constitutive interactivity of subjects and objects. Davis then pushes this reconsidered middle voice back into conversation with Lévinasian themes through Lyotard and Cixous who clarify that the subject speaking "I am written" exposes its vulnerability. Cixous writes that the "initial position [of the subject writing] is a leaving oneself go, leaving oneself to sink to the bottom of now" which requires a "passivity that is, as always, active" (41). Similarly, Lyotard articulates writing as a mode of resistance which relies on "the ability to be weak, a good weakness, so-called passivity . . . passability . . . the ability to wait for, not to look at, but to wait for – for what, precisely, we don't know" (403). Thus, what Davis recognizes is that Lévinas's phenomenology works descriptively – his articulation of

good and bad infinity, for example, aptly describe an Ego (Moi) that is lost to itself and an I (moi) who speaks “here I am” in deference to the Other; that same phenomenology, however, does not account for practice. As Dalton points out, while Lévinas wants the categories of the good and bad infinite to be “purged” from one another, “a strange ambiguity appears between the two categories of the work” (“Phenomenology and the Infinite” 44). This is perhaps why Lévinas himself cannot stop from slipping into the middle voice precisely as he describes the kind of passivity Davis draws out of Barthes, Lyotard, and Cixous. Notice the medial construction of “to be offered” at work in the following passage:

“Sensibility is exposedness to the other. Not the passivity of inertia, a persistence in a state of rest or of movement, the capacity to undergo the cause that would bring it out of that state. Exposure as a sensibility is more passive still; it is like an inversion of the *conatus of esse*, a *having been offered* without any holding back, a not finding any protection in any consistency or identity of a state. It is a *having been offered* without any holding back and not the generosity of offering oneself, which would be an act, and already presupposes the unlimited undergoing of the sensibility. In the *having been offered* without any holding back the past infinitive form underlines the non-present, the non-commencement, the non-initiative of the sensibility.” (75, emphasis added)

Here we see Lévinas’s descriptive phenomenology bumping up against rhetorical praxis. He describes “having been offered” as the past infinitive in order to designate the

lack of choice the subject has in its being offering up – I am offered up, he argues, prior to my ability to speak “I”.

In speaking “I have been offered,” the subject finds a means of being actively passive, the “ability to be weak” (Lyotard 403). Davis shifts the register from phenomenology to rhetorical practice through Barthes, not to escape an ethical conundrum, but to offer a way for writers to honor this always already ethical rendering. We can see the point more clearly, I think, if we draw a parallel between Lévinas’s discussion of “having been offered” to Barthes’s explanation of the middle voice through the verb to sacrifice:

According to the classic example . . . the verb *to sacrifice* (ritually) is active if the priest sacrifices the victim in my place and for me [I sacrifice], and it is middle voice if, taking the knife from the priest’s hands, I make the sacrifice for my own sake [I am sacrificed, I sacrifice myself] . . . (18)

Leaving aside for a moment the potential inconsistency of sacrificing oneself for oneself with a Lévinasian notion of being always for the Other, it’s crucial to point out that the construction of “I am sacrificed” is one that can never take place. If the subject utters it just prior to sliding the knife across its throat, its performative power is limited, more accurately described as “I am about to be sacrificed” which both puts off the action of the verb and the mediality of the subject to act upon itself. Importantly, the only way this sacrifice is performable is in its writing. Of course, Lévinas is correct that I have already been offered up to the Other in a way that occludes my ability to choose my own offering, but Barthes points us towards the importance of rhetorical performativity: the middle voice is a means of writing respons-ability. To write “I am sacrificed,” “I am

offered up,” or “I am written” is one way of doing what one can and acknowledging what one cannot do. I cannot offer myself to you; nevertheless, I am offered to you. I cannot sacrifice myself to you; nevertheless, I am sacrificed. I cannot write myself to you; nevertheless, I am written.

Thus, Davis operates under a different definition of the middle voice, one which hinges on the intractability of the work of the subject and the working-over of the subject by the Other. Davis participates in the recovery of the middle voice, but does so by skipping Heidegger altogether and aligns her activation of the middle voice with Barthes and Foucault; doing so enables her to focus more precisely on proposing the middle voice as a resource for teaching writing which foregrounds the inter-animation of passivity and activity in every linguistic encounter.

2. Writing Wants You Dispossessed

Another disposition which cultivates sensitivity to the ethical-rhetorical hinges on moving from what a writer does to what writing does. Notice in the following passage from “Finitude’s Clamor,” Davis switches out the subjects of her sentences, from “the writer” to Writing,” a gerund functioning as a nominal:

The writer is not an immanent subject for a finite be-coming . . . [*W*]hat *one* is becoming is also perpetually becoming – so one can never be quite sure where one is headed . . . *Writing*, even when it performs an imposition of immanence (here), involves an ex-position of imminence (to come). (136, emphasis added)

What Davis does here is, first, to designate the double role of language as that which imposes and exposes, which is the imposition of finite signifiers that, at the same time,

exposes the ungraspable distance between the Other and the subject. Second, Davis initiates a conversation about the dispossession of the subject by putting a verb phrase in the nominal role in order to focus on writing itself, something Bernard-Donals picks up and extends in an article for the special issue of *Philosophy and Rhetoric: Extrahuman Rhetorical Relations: Addressing the Animal, the Object, the Dead, and the Divine*.

Taken with writing in the middle voice, dispossessing the subject is a cultivated disposition the ethical rhetorical offers to writing studies. Before addressing how Bernard-Donals works with the notion of dispossessing the subject, allow me to first establish the context and argument within which dispossession appears.

In the special issue, Bernard-Donals responds to Diane Davis (one of the co-editors of the special issue) and her call to consider the divine as marking “the extremity of the address that compels us as subjects” in his essay “Divine Cruelty and Rhetorical Violence” (401). As co-editor of the special issue, Davis called for work that examines the work of Lévinas in various rhetorical veins. Bernard-Donals takes up that call by considering how writing the divine operates at the limit of the call to respond, what Davis has called elsewhere “response-ability.” For Bernard-Donals, divine rhetoric is instructive because it enables him to work out the coterminousness of rhetoric and violence, as well as the displacement of the subject. He writes, “What I have tried to suggest so far is that rhetoric is characterized by displacement. Particularly in the language of Derrida and Lévinas, the displacement is in turn characterized by violence. . . .”(403). What he’s getting at is the assumption that discourse of any kind, but made particularly plain in rhetorics of the divine, are always acts of ethical violence. He characterizes this starting place as follows:

To [speak] is a constitutively violent act, not a volitional act of purposeful violence whose aim is power over the other. It is a violence that we can't avoid, a violence that inheres in the structure of rhetoric itself, stripping the speaker of the assumptions she makes when speaking a name for herself.

(404)

This base line, he suggests, is most evident in what he calls divine cruelty, that compulsion to respond to the divine, a non-human rhetor that nevertheless compels speech. He goes about examining it through the case study of the seven-page Caryl Churchill play, *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza*. Examining Churchill's play leads him to a set of conclusions about writing which I want to consider; Bernard-Donals' work here serves as a round-about pedagogy of sorts which considers how writing the divine exposes exposedness. This work leads him to a set of conclusions about writing and violence from which we can extract some conclusions on dispossessing the subject as a disposition for teaching the ethical rhetorical. Divine cruelty, it seems, lays plain dispossession as another possible means of cultivating the ethical-rhetorical within writing studies.

Bernard-Donals begins with the perhaps unusual articulation that writing of this sort is a-social. His point is that writing is "not so much a process of communication" but rather is "an encounter with events" (410); the subject is not so much one within an exchange of ideas between discrete, bounded conscious identities, but rather as Bernard-Donals reports from Badiou, "one who is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path" (409). Bernard-Donals goes on to describe how the subject's function as a node enabling truth's path has two ramifications: first, it convokes a fidelity

to the Other within the subject which desires to keep these moments of rupture open; and second, it positions the writing subject as inside an a-social relationship with others. The rhetorical subject is that spoken or written articulation of “I” whose function is not so much to communicate, but to hold open the site of rupture, to be riven. Bernard-Donals says that this “a-social subject in fidelity . . . writes in the midst of others but . . . is not dependent on others” (410). What Bernard-Donals argues here is that discourse functions alongside my encounters with the Other and enables the continued exposure of the riven subject (410). What is central to my consideration of Bernard-Donals work is how this shift from considering what I (the individual person) do to the consideration of what the writing subject does functions to sort out how to manage the violence of writing.

What we see in in Bernard-Donals' discussion of divine cruelty is the possibilities within dispossession for cultivating a sensitivity to the ethical-rhetorical. It's by dispossessing the subject that Bernard-Donals articulates what writing does: “Writing of this sort is meant to continue to expose the (riven) subject” (410). And this exposing function of writing is separated from what an individual wants or wishes. Bernard-Donals, quoting Judith Butler, argues that “Individuals are not free,” but rather that “they are responsible not for ‘cultivating a will, but of making use of an unwilled susceptibility as a resource for becoming responsive to the Other’” (411-12). It's key to remember that this unwilled susceptibility is layered with language, subjectivity, and exposedness and thus, in speaking one, we name them all. This is Bernard-Donals' objective: to demonstrate that to write is to expose and nominalizing a verb draws our attention to the Other and our obligation to it. Thus, Bernard-Donals takes up a verb phrase in the

nominal slot to describe the giving of an account that responds to the Other by way of the dispossession of the subject:

To write in this context is to write – to use Butler’s terms – in order to “give an account.” It is writing that is situated within and among other writing, other practices, other practices and acts that recognizes both its limitations and its orientations toward the future through the proliferation of other writing . . .

It is a writing that is radically conditional, because . . . it dispossesses the writer” (412)

So of course we can’t escape the fact that at the end of the day “I” will write and “I” will give an account, but nominalizing the verb “to write” is an artifice that echoes the dispossession of the writer/subject that takes place each time it speaks. Nominalizing “to write” de-emphasizes the subject and its experiences and highlights its function as an unwilling node, susceptible to the Other; moreover, and I think more importantly, it emphasizes that the “I” (*moi*) has no sway over my rivenness, but by nominalizing “to write”, “I” (*moi*) can get out of the way, offer my discourse up more freely to exposure, and thereby draw more intentional attention to our obligation to all Others.

What I’m suggesting is that Bernard-Donals’ exploration dispossessing the subject posits a resource for writers that shift emphasis away from self-exploration and expression to a consideration of the obligations and infringements that impinge the writing subject. Of course, such impositions are only impositions as long as we see ourselves as individual subjects with something to say and not as nodes and resources for writing which speak out of obligation to the Other. Notice again the location of the

urgency that compels writing in Bernard-Donals' work; it is not internal to the subject, nor exactly social either. Rather, the urgency that drives writing emerges from a sequence of contingencies that begins with an encounter with an Other and ends with obligation: "So we are compelled by the urgency," he writes, "of what lies behind and beyond us . . . to continue to write, to continue to act, not knowing just what will become of us and just how we will engage with the others in whose midst we are compelled to act" (412).

Finally, Bernard-Donals' work is instructive because in putting the subject in its place – that is, out of the way – he comes to grips with the violence which, as he puts it, "is a violence we can't avoid" (404). By the dispossession of the subject, Bernard-Donals seems to put this violence in its place too. It's not that the dispossessed subject can thereby choose to be more or less violent, but the writer can choose to dispossess its subjectivity on the page and draw attention to the violence that emerges from obligation to the Other. Writing this way says that I cannot abdicate my responsibility which brings with it the unavoidability of language's wounds, but I can get myself out of writing's path and offer up my language as a resource, a node for more transparent encounters with the Other.

3. Writing Wants What It Wants

So what I'm observing here in Davis and extrapolating from Bernard-Donals are two attempts within writing studies to articulate habits, techniques, approaches that teachers of writing may take up to cultivate a sensitivity to the ethical-rhetorical. Both are approaches to the teaching of writing that sort out writing's inheritance of violence without offering up propositional criteria to educators. Taking the middle voice and the

dispossession of the subject as dispositions for writing and teaching seems to shift the paradigm away from a discussion of what I ought to do and toward the impossibility of an answer and the question itself. These dispositions, I contend, posit an inquiry into writing itself as the best means to sort out responsibility under the weight of discursive violence. “What does the writing want?” emerges as a question that possibly avoids the dilemma of “What should I write?” and “What should I teach?” because asking what the writing wants looks instead at the speaking subject and the writing itself the enactment of obligation that emerges in the face to face encounter with the Other. Yes, this trace of language that flows out from the encounter is a wounding, but these dispositions recognize that the best response to my responsibility for these wounds is to get out of the way of the language. It’s no coincidence that Davis’s directive that “Judgments must be made” is made in the imperative, subject-less, voice; what we see here is Davis trying to get out of the way, honoring her obligations by tucking herself as subject as far as possible. In so doing, it seems that Davis replies to Vitanza’s question, “What is it that writing wants?” (“Abandoned to Writing”).

Again, I am presenting the middle voice (Davis), dispossession (Bernard-Donals), and now “What writing wants” (Vitanza) not as recommendations for my own or others’ practices. Rather, my goal is draw our attention to three metaphorical approaches within writing studies that force a confrontation with the Other and cultivate a sympathy for the ethical-rhetorical. They are attempts, simply put, to hear the Other when we teach writing. Similarly to what we observed in Chapter Three when we considered what I labelled *topoi* of the Other that appeared in writing studies, what I want to point to here are Davis’s, Bernard-Donals’, and Vitanza’s activation of

metaphors for writing pedagogy that might just train the writer to write under the rich exposure of exposedness. I don't so much present them as best practices for the classroom, but as performative experiments into how to cultivate an Other-centered writerly disposition. Vitanza, I submit, offers up the most highly performative and metaphorical rendering of these possibilities.

Writing for *Enculturation* in 2003, Vitanza offers up a meditation on the intersection of rhetoric and composition within the field. He begins with questions like, "Where is rhetoric in 'composition studies'?" ("Abandoned to Writing"). What Vitanza is considering in such questions is the rhetoricity of composition itself, or how rhetoric impinges upon the speaking subject. Writing in a format that's best described by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "lines of flight," Vitanza calls for what he calls a third position between passive and active response, an alternative to entirely social or entirely expressive theorizations of writing. Instead, Vitanza argues for a "radical passivity" that would disrupt and reorient the teaching of writing. Notice how, as he rethinks the teaching of college writing through this notion of radical passivity that he places certain subject and verb forms into question. He writes, "Perhapless (sic), there are two possibilities here. 'We' can start teaching writing precisely as the university needs it taught. Or 'we' can attempt 'to teach' writing the way 'we' want" ("Abandoned to Writing"). Here, radical passivity leads Vitanza to problematize the subject "we" in affinity with the way Bernard-Donals also troubles the speaking subject's autonomy. At the same time, Vitanza draws attention to the infinitive formation of the verb "to teach" which shifts us into the middle voice. From here, Vitanza makes a crucial, radically passive move.

After reminding us of the limits of the subject and marking its status as its own type of violent interruption, Vitanza shifts to consider writing as its own imperative, writing as the warrant for more writing. “But there are, let us not forget, third (interval) wayves,” Vitanza writes. “And therefore, ‘we’ should ask: **What is it that writing wants?**” (“Abandoned to Writing”, emphasis in original). Aligning, I contend, with Davis and Bernard-Donals by speaking in the middle voice as a means to dispossess the writer, Vitanza continues as follows:

I will skip (rocks across the sur-face) what “we” might want writing to want. Writing just wants. Wants, W.ants. It’s not that writing wants what “we” want when “we” know what “we” want! Rather, WRITING WANTS! Just WANTS! (“Abandoned to Writing”)

By continually marking the conditionality of the subject—the inverted commas impinge upon subjectivity and question its status, its authority to speak—Vitanza leverages the “unwilled susceptibility” of the speaking subject to be, as Bernard-Donals puts it, “a resource for becoming responsive to the Other” (“Divine Cruelty” 411-12). Such responsivity unworks the work, to use Davis’s phrase (“Finitude’s Clamor” 139).

D. Conclusion: Going Backward, Moving Forward

Vitanza’s vision of “wayves” is important as an image for thinking about the practice of cultivating “pained attention.” Wayves come in, and go back out as part of a process, a process in which we can participate, but which we neither started, control, nor end. The writerly dispositions for teachers of writing are thus opportunities both to recognize that they are standing in the wayves and to invite students to see them standing in the wayves. Notably, these dispositions do little to settle the SRTOL debate, or even to take a hard line on the

resolution itself. Rather, teaching into vulnerability—a vulnerability already present, which is what Lévinas is getting at when he describes infinite obligation to the Other as “to teach or to be taught”—draws attention what is already there. What I’m advocating, both as a response to SRTOL and, by extension, to teachers of writing, is that attending to the vulnerability of the Other that is executed in language is a practice for teaching and for being taught. Davis, Bernard-Donals, and Vitanza, then, are useful as thought experiments into how writing studies might imagine a writerly disposition that cultivates a receptivity to the ethical-rhetorical, drawing it out more plainly.

VI. CONCLUSION: “THE HUMAN ADVENTURE OF THE APPROACH OF THE OTHER”

“ . . . this offering of language, this voice, teaches in such a way as to breach the circle of exchange.”

(Standish, “Towards an Economy of Higher Education” 61)

The final section of *Students’ Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook* begins with two recent essays that return readers to the polarized positions within the SRTOL debate about what to do about non-standard dialects in the writing classroom. Both essays, interestingly, originally appear on *The New York Times’* blog, *Opinionator*. Appearing in 2009, Stanley Fish stakes out a contemporary argument for bidialectalism (although he doesn’t call it that) in “What Should Colleges Teach? Part 3.” He argues in his idiosyncratic way that “if students infected with the facile egalitarianism of soft multiculturalism declare, ‘I have a right to my own language,’” that educators should confirm their right and then state, “I’m here to teach you another one.” Fish concludes his pedagogical recommendations with an aside and a charge: “(Who could object to learning a second language?) And then get on with it.” (457). Appearing in 2011, H. Samy Alim advances a progressive vision of language’s activist possibilities in “What If We Occupied Language?” Here, Alim concludes in much cooler terms but with far deeper progressive conviction that, as a movement, “Occupy Language can be a critical, progressive linguistic movement that exposes how language is used as a means of social, political, and economic control” (462). While both writers arrive at dramatically

different recommendations, Fish and Alim point us once again to the arrangement whereby the teaching of writing finds its ethical footing in its service to the *polis*. The question I'd like to now take up is whether the work developed in this project has gotten us any further away from the *polis*, or if getting away from the *polis* is desirable or even possible. Perhaps something else is at work.

Fish, it seems, concedes that “[i]t may be true that the standard language is an instrument of power and device for protecting the status quo,” but then leverages that reality as precisely the “reason for teaching it [Edited American English] to students who are being prepared for entry into the world as it is now . . . You’re not going to change the world,” Fish reminds us, “if you’re not equipped with the tools that speak to its present condition” (456). For Fish, there’s no question that the service rendered by teaching writing is tied to its ability to prepare students for “entry into the world.” Fish seems to have no problem with the notion that the good work of writing is inextricably linked to the good people can do in the world. And on this point, it would seem, Alim would agree. “By occupying language, we can expose how educational, political, and social institutions use language” to achieve control. Occupying language, Alim argues, responds to the marginalization of oppressed groups, opposes negative stereotypes codified in language, and intervenes into public discourse and the status quo of discrimination and racism (462-63). So while Fish and Alim point to differing executions of one’s responsibilities—which is why the editors chose these two essays to bring the collection to a close—as teachers of writing who are bound up with the good they can offer the democratic community they serve. The agreement on the *polis*’s centrality for rendering an ethical warrant for writing studies is the starting point for my efforts to

trouble this arrangement, even while the editors of the *Critical Sourcebook* point to these ideas as the “Lingering Questions” (the name of the section in which the essays are included) the field must grapple with after a full consideration of SRTOL.

By calling Lévinas to the scene, my work troubles the inter-animation of the *polis* and the teaching of writing, but has Lévinas’s the third become an a-politicalized version of the *polis*? As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, bringing the voice of Lévinas to bear “teaches in such a way as to breach the circle of exchange” (Standish, “Towards an Economy of Higher Education” 61). Lévinas breaches the ways in which the *polis* circles in an ethical economy of exchange with writing studies. In so doing we open onto, I hope, a more accurate picture of the ethicality of rhetorical practices themselves. Lévinas offers to writing studies a rendering of ethicality as a rhetorical condition which begins and ends in obligation to the face of an Other. Such a picture of the ethical rhetorical, I contend, is a more robust and sustainable model than one tied to the *polis*. Not that Lévinas’s work comes to writing studies without concern. As Chapters Four and Five tease out, Lévinas’s phenomenology forces us to confront the ways in which violence is always on the table as a rhetorical practice; but bringing Lévinas to bear on rhetorical practices becomes a form of *parrhesia*, a telling the truth which refuses to skirt the violence that encumbers us when we speak and write with one another.

Thus, my work contributes to an emerging conversation—as we’ve seen in the work of Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, Michael Bernard-Donals, Diane Davis, and Janis Haswell, Richard Haswell, and Glenn Blalock—that invites Lévinas to speak to writing studies. Specifically, I demonstrate that one way scholars have managed the Lévinasian idea of infinite obligation to an Other is through *topoi* of

impossibility. These *topoi*, some more fruitful than others, are attempts to activate a rhetorical practice that foregrounds infinite obligation in rhetorical criticism. As a result of considering these *topoi*, I conclude that any attempt to address our obligations to all Others must be well-grounded in the complicity of language with violence. Defining ethical violence as unique from ontological violence enables us to see a way to acknowledge the difficult possibilities of addressing Others. Facing into this difficulty leads me to seek out writerly dispositions, modes of approaching the teaching of writing transparently, where the encounter with Others, the intractability of ethical violence, and the possibilities for justice and peace are made, hopefully, as plain as they may be.

My arguments open other avenues of consideration. One such avenue, perhaps most notable for rhetoricians and philosophers, is the difficulty of moving from phenomenology to rhetorical practice. Many have noted that Lévinas's work doesn't lend itself to simple applications, as in some ethical decision-making chart. At its center, Lévinas's philosophy aims to describe something fundamental about the human experience that begins with the Face of the Other which grounds the possibility of subjectivity. As Lévinas puts it, "The tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility" (EI 97). This formulation of infinite responsibility seems to set conceptual limits around writing practices, most importantly, as noted in Chapter 5, as a writer I have to say something and at some point it seems I must stop saying "Here I am" to an Other if only to say "Here I am" to an other Other (ibid). Exploring the *topoi* of impossibility and the writerly dispositions captured under the banner "Writing Wants What It Wants," begins to walk through Lévinas's phenomenology with an eye toward practice, but there's

certainly more to be said here as these explorations of obligation to the Other are figurative, experimental metaphors.

The implications of my work for the teaching of writing linger here too. What do these dispositions mean for working researchers and teachers of writing studies? I have intentionally resisted taking a firm position on SRTOL and what it means to import a Lévinasian ethic here, except to assert that a Lévinasian ethic is always already at work. Beyond that critical and descriptive project, I want to leave open the question of what we ought to do about language variety in the writing classroom. It seems that both Fish and Alim are getting some things right and others wrong; perhaps the best way forward is to resist the imposition of iron-clad policies which shuttle to the side our mutual vulnerability. Teachers of writing, it seems to me, might begin by acknowledging mutual vulnerability and obligation, the impossibility of getting it right, the difficulties inherent in working with language, and then get on with making each Other's life better.

One of the difficulties of this project, especially when I begin to use language like 'making each Other's life better' is how to manage Lévinas's own refusal to address the political. As Ralph Cintron points out, the genesis of Lévinas' phenomenology is a biting critique of the liberal imagination, but Lévinas recoils from naming it as such (R. Cintron, personal communication, 05 August 2015). Consider as an example how Lévinas's work on obligation sounds like a tailor-made response to economic and liberal individualism. Notice how Marx's description of the liberal imaginary below functions as the political problem Lévinas wants to correct, just in apolitical ways:

This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. These four terms, Marx goes on, identify the fundamental components of the Western liberal imagination, components Lévinas is hell-bent on undermining. He goes on:

Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself.

Here, Marx enumerates the elements of what we saw Säfström describe earlier as humanism drunk on itself, a liberalism that thinks itself equal and free, and thus capable of individualized ownership. In what follows, we hear Marx as a precursor to Lévinas pointing to the indefensibility of private self-interest:

The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all. (123)

I realize I'm going out on a limb here, invoking Marx as a proto-Lévinasian just pages before I conclude; nevertheless, I do so because I think in order to aptly end this consideration of the role of the *polis* in writing studies generally and in SRTOL specifically, I need to gesture to both a shortcoming of my project – I don't, so it seems, ever really escape the political in any substantial way – and then push away from Lévinas's own resistance to delving into the political. If nothing else, this project works to take Lévinas so seriously as an ethical paradigm for reconsidering pedagogy that we inevitably come to the political ends of Lévinas's work and their implications for Western liberalism. Thus, I end where the next version of this project begins: a consideration of Lévinas's work as a means of cultivating dispositions within the *polis* which question the subject as a producer of knowledge, ideas, and political capital and yet affirm the subject's capacity as a receptive space for acknowledging obligation to the Other; perhaps what I'm getting at is how ipseity functions as a rhetorical architectonic. Pedagogy, then, might just come to be seen as a liturgical practice for cultivating sensitivity to our obligation to the Other. This, as I said, is where I begin again.

I have come to appreciate the moment in Stephen Judy's fictional dialogue about SRTOL, analyzed in Chapter 3, where the moderator "rises and speaks into the microphone" to announce the start of a discussion of SRTOL's merits and pitfalls, "but hears only a high pitched note of feedback." The moderator, obliged to the group of Others assembled, can't just sit back down: "After adjusting the mike, the Moderator tries again" (6). This scene emblemizes something critical about the work I've undertaken here, to find some means of navigating multiple infinite obligations on multiple fronts. In Lévinasian terms, we see the moderator rise and prepare to

announce, “Here I am [*moi voici*]” (*EI* 97), and offer subjectivity as a resource for Others—and it fails. The limits of the said to approach the saying fly back into the Moderator’s ears right there in front of the Faces of the Others. Nevertheless, the moderator accepts the responsibility of the task, the obligation to move forward towards some as yet unknown goal, and tries again. I imagine this scene as a parallel for the space of inquiry we find ourselves in, where the obligation to announce “Here I am” confronts the impossibility of fully doing so, yet that compulsion drives us forward. There is value in questioning the *polis* by taking up Lévinas’s infinite obligation as an ethical grounding for our work precisely because it embraces failure and obligation, setting us off towards unknown ends.

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Education

Candidate - Doctor of Philosophy (English)
University of Illinois at Chicago - Chicago, Illinois
Advanced to Candidacy October 2012

Master of Arts (English), 2007
University of British Columbia - Vancouver, British Columbia

Honours Bachelor of Arts with High Distinction (English and Canadian Studies), 2005
University of Toronto - Toronto, Ontario

Professional Experience

Assistant Professor of Composition and Literature, 2010-present
Rock Valley College, Rockford, IL
Tenured August 2013

Teaching Assistant, First Year Writing Program, 2007-2009
Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago

Teaching Assistant, First Year Writing Program, 2005-2007
Department of English, University of British Columbia

Institutional Service

Current

Faculty Liason, Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence (Rock Valley College)
Academic Council, Chair (Rock Valley College)
Composition Committee, Chair (Rock Valley College)
Literature Committee, Member (Rock Valley College)
Promoting an Inclusive Community, Member (Rock Valley College)
Assessment Committee, (Rock Valley College)

Past

Learning and Opportunity Center Advisory Board, Member (Rock Valley College)
Faculty Member of the Year Committee, Member (Rock Valley College)

Facilitator, Creating an Inclusive Community Staff Workshop Series, (Rock Valley College)

Lectures & Conference Proceedings

"Between Awareness and Alarm: Contemporary Representations of Autistic People." First Tuesday Lecture Series. Rock Valley College. October 2015.

"Banned Books and the First Amendment." Co-presenter with Maureen Lowry-Fritz. Rock Valley College. Banned Books Week Events. September 2015.

"Universal Design for Instruction." Fall Conference. Rock Valley College. September 2015.

"Risky Relations: Relations and the Ethics of Identification." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Tampa, FL. March 2015. Panelist.

Academic Publishing in Rhetorical Studies. Workshop Participant. Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute, Madison, WI. June 2015.

~~"Why Can't My Students Write?"~~ New Faculty Orientation Workshop Series. Rock Valley College. Rockford, IL, October 2014.

Is a Rhetorical Ethics Possible? Workshop Participant. Rhetoric Society of America, Lawrence, KS. June 2013.

"Archival Research and the Origins of Composition." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Las Vegas, NV. March 2013. Unable to Attend.

"Critics and Citizens for New Capitalism: The Antinomy of the First-Year Writer." Rhetoric Society of America, Philadelphia, PA. April 2012.

"Rock Valley College Assessment Project." Association for Assessment of Learning in Higher Education, Albuquerque, NM. May 2012.

Critical Discourse Analysis Workshop Participant. Rhetoric Society of America, Boulder, CO. June 2011.

Workshop Participant. Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, GA. March 2010.

"America the Stopgap: Critical Limits of the Nation in Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka* and Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*." for the conference *Power of Form and Forms of Power*, AEGIS Conference at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. 3-5 April 2008.

"'Living Contracts': Editing as Authoring in Toby Litt's *Finding Myself* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*," for the conference *Playing the Angles*, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC. 9-11 March 2007. Accepted, unable to attend.

"The Image of Authorship: Constructing an Author for Creative Writing Pedagogy," for the conference *Great Writing 2006*, School of Creative Arts, Film and Media, University of Portsmouth, UK, 9-11 June 2006.

Non-Peer Reviewed Publications

["Five Things Every Autism Dad Should Know."](#) *Autism Speaks Blog*. Autism Speaks. 06 June 2014. Web.

"Douglas Coupland's *jPod*." *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Fiction*. NY: Facts on File, 2009.

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Scholarships, Awards & Distinctions

Nominee, Faculty Member of the Year, 2011, 2013, 2014 (RVC)
 Board of Trustee's Tuition Waiver, 2010-2014 (UIC)
 Graduate Student Teaching Fellowships, 2007-2010 (UIC)
 Graduate Student Travel Awards, 2008 (UIC)
 Chicago Consular Scholarship, 2008 (UIC)
 Georgeanna McInnes Scholarship, 2005 (University of Toronto)
 Dean's List Scholar, 2005 (University of Toronto)
 Regent's In-Course Scholarship, 2004 (University of Toronto)
 Canadian Scholars' Press Award, 2004 (University of Toronto)

Professional Memberships

Rhetoric Society of America
 Conference on College Composition and Communication
 Rock Valley College Faculty Association